STREET SPIRIT

Volume 22, No. 4 April 2016 Donation: $1.00

A publication of the American Friends Service Committee

JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Songs of Healing in a World Torn by War

The *Street Spirit* Interview with Country Joe McDonald

by Terry Messman

When Country Joe McDonald, one of the major anti-war voices of the Vietnam era, began expressing support and solidarity for military veterans and combat nurses, his eyes were opened to a fuller understanding of the issues of war and peace, and he began writing songs that enlarged our vision of nonviolence and the peace movement.

As he listened to the troops forced to fight the nation's wars, and learned from combat nurses who cared for grievously wounded and dying soldiers, McDonald's songs became more deeply expressive of the values of compassion and reconciliation. A seeming paradox lies at the heart of his work: Reverence for life was born anew amidst the atrocities of war.

McDonald has been a voice for peace for 50 years, stretching all the way back to his days as an anti-war folk singer on the streets of Berkeley in 1965, through his performances at massive antiwar demonstrations in the late 1960s, and up until the present day, when he still sings for peace at anti-war protests and veterans events.

A traveling troubadour for peace, McDonald has performed at anti-nuclear actions at Livermore Lab in California and at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. He has sung for small homeless sleep-outs in Berkeley and gigantic peace rallies at the U.S. Capitol.

Along the way, he has composed a remarkable body of peace anthems. Yet he has also enlarged our understanding of the goals of the peace movement by insisting that the soldiers sent into battle are also victims of war, and that military veterans need to be welcomed home and offered justice when they return.

I interviewed Country Joe McDonald in the North Berkeley home he shares with his wife and family. Joe has been married for 32 years to Kathy McDonald, and he has five children. His wife Kathy is a labor and delivery nurse and midwife. A niece and daughter are nurses. His brother retired as a nurse practitioner from Kaiser after 36 years.

During the interview, I read to McDonald the words of Florence Nightingale, the Crimean War nurse who has become one of his most cherished heroes. Nightingale said, "I stand at the altar of the murdered men and while I live I fight their cause."

That one sentence speaks volumes. In saying she stands at the altar, she tells us that soldiers have been sacrificed in war, and that their lives are sacred to her. In saying she fights their cause "while she lives," she dedicates her entire life to them.

The Murdered Men

When I asked McDonald what those words meant to him, he said: "I stand at the altar of the *murdered* men."

"I love the word murdered. MURDERED. These men were murdered. They didn't serve their country. They were *murdered*. They were murdered not by the enemy. They were murdered by war. They were murdered by their government."

McDonald has lifted his own voice time and time again for the murdered men, the soldiers and the veterans. He consistently tried to give a voice to the GIs on the front lines, the working-class kids shipped off to hellish fields of slaughter they had no part in creating.

He saw no contradiction between writing anthems of peace in defense of the children and civilians killed in Vietnam, Central America, Chile and Iraq; and in also speaking out for the soldiers slain in battle or killed after returning home from wartime exposure to Agent Orange.

Listening to the views of military veterans and Vietnam War combat nurses finally led him to the great icon of compassion and mercy, Florence Nightingale, often called the founder of nursing.

Joe McDonald at Florence Nightingale's grave in England. Photo: David Bennett Cohen

Country Joe McDonald pays tribute to the combat nurses who offer a better vision of wartime heroism by bravely bringing healing and mercy into war zones where medical care is a matter of life and death.

The Girl Next Door (Combat Nurse)

Even though 7,465 women were Vietnam veterans, the role of women in the military went largely ignored until Lynda Van Devanter, an army surgical nurse who had been stationed at an evacuation hospital in South Vietnam, spoke out about the forgotten women who had served in Vietnam.

When Van Devanter told veterans groups that they had ignored the women who had served next to them in Vietnam, McDonald took it to heart, and wrote a powerful song that describes what happens when the girl next door becomes a combat nurse. ("The girl next door" was Van Devanter's own description of her life before Vietnam.)

Lynda Van Devanter became a leader in bringing national attention to women veterans struggling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and exposure to Agent Orange. She was the founder and executive director of the Women's Project of the Vietnam Veterans of America, directing studies of the terrible health problems and PTSD suffered by women veterans. She maintained that Vietnam veterans were ''a forgotten minority,'' but the women who had served as nurses were ''the most forgotten.''

McDonald's song "The Girl Next Door (Combat Nurse)" describes how combat nurses save lives in the most horrific circumstances. It also gives an unforgettable account of the torment that afflicted the nurse when she returned home, so much so that her childhood friends can't understand why she is not fun anymore.

"But a vision of the wounded
screams inside her brain
And the girl next door
will never be the same."

It's an indelible image: "A vision of the wounded screams inside her brain."

Van Devanter struggled with terrifying hallucinations and recurring nightmares of the wounded soldiers she had cared for in Vietnam, and when she returned home, her life was never the same.

Finally, she fell victim to a fatal disease she had carried home from the battlefield. The Vietnam Veterans of America attributed her death to a vascular disease from wartime exposure to Agent Orange.

McDonald has great respect for Lynda Van Devanter, Rose Sandecki and combat nurses who nursed soldiers in Vietnam, then came home and helped veterans deal with the fallout of war, the diseases caused by Agent Orange, and the psychological damage that ruined so many lives.

Rose Sandecki served as an Army Nurse Captain in Vietnam. Her painful experiences while nursing badly wounded and dying soldiers led her to become leader of a Veterans Administration outreach center dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder after the war.

When McDonald told Sandecki how Florence Nightingale returned to England from the Crimean War and refused to talk to her family, or the press, or anybody, and just snuck home in private, Sandecki told him that she had come home in secret in exactly the same way from Vietnam.

The Lady with the Lamp

It seems predestined that McDonald's desire for veterans to be treated with respect and understanding — instead of being written off by their own government — would lead him straight to the woman who provided medical care, compassion and friendship to thousands of soldiers dying alone and friendless on nameless battlefields — Florence Nightingale.

He had soon read everything he could find about Florence Nightingale's pioneering work in battlefield nursing during the Crimean War. He was so impressed by her dedication and compassion that he

See **Songs of Healing by Country Joe** *page 8*

Suitcase Clinic Holds First Town Hall on Homelessness

by Sam Lew

The Suitcase Clinic provides medical services, employment, housing and community resources, a warm meal and a place to chat for our clients. But we ask ourselves how effective we are truly being in serving the homeless?

How many times have we actually asked the people and the communities we are serving what they want and what they need? Are our services aligned with those needs — and, more importantly, is our organization structured so that clients can provide feedback that informs and transforms our services and the way we provide them?

These questions were the ones that spurred the creation of Suitcase Clinic's first Town Hall on Homelessness, an open forum for homeless people to share their stories, opinions and suggestions around the topic of homelessness.

On Saturday, March 5, 2016, nearly 70 homeless individuals, social service providers and students gathered at the North Berkeley Senior Center to listen and discuss homelessness. The event began with breakfast, followed by public comment and a group discussion about solutions and what could be done next.

The Town Hall focused on homelessness in Berkeley, rather than the Suitcase Clinic's organization, although many participants were attendees of the clinic.

It was an emotional morning as people voiced their grievances and personal experiences with homelessness. Many of them echoed the feeling of a lack of dignity, particularly with the scarce number of restrooms and showers available to homeless people, strict shelter rules, and the way that homelessness is perceived by society.

"People don't realize how hard it is to survive on the street," said Tim, one participant of the Town Hall. "In the newspaper, all you see is the homeless are the problem, but let people show they are people."

There was also a sense of community and unity during the Town Hall as participants encouraged and supported one another.

"Homeless people are the most creative, talented people I've ever met — we have to be. I've seen it through artwork, musicians, the places we design to sleep," one woman commented about the lack of employment for homeless people. "We are wasting huge amounts of human potential and talent."

Shawn O' Conner added, "Just give us an opportunity. If we have employment, that means we're going to pay taxes on everything. We just want to live here and *give to the community."*

The Suitcase Clinic held a Town Hall on Homelessness in Berkeley, a forum for homeless people to share stories and ideas.

"Homeless people are the most creative, talented people I've ever met — we have to be. I've seen it through artwork, musicians, the places we design to sleep," one woman commented about the lack of employment for homeless people. "We are wasting huge amounts of human potential and talent."

After the Town Hall, many participants expressed interest in making it a monthly or bi-monthly event. While the Homeless Commission and the Berkeley Task Force are both spaces provided by the City of Berkeley that engage community members to speak and learn about homelessness, they may be inaccessible to homeless folks. Both committees meet in the evening, when homeless shelters require people to be back at the shelter.

"Of all the city meetings I go to about homelessness, there are never any homeless people there. But when we connect ourselves, we can make a difference," said Paul Kealoha-Blake, who serves on the Berkeley homeless commission.

James Huynh, Executive Director of the Suitcase Clinic, reflected on the Town Hall, saying, "Someone just walked out of the door and said to me, 'thank you for giving me a voice,' but I didn't give him a voice. We only gave him food.

"All the content here was generated by them, and for them to thank us always puts me back into perspective of what we are going against. It's a system thing that permeates in people not having a chance to speak or be heard in their daily lives, which has real effects when trying to fight these systemic issues."

This is not something that the Suitcase Clinic can do alone — nor do we want to. Ending homelessness requires a collaborative effort between many organizations, government agencies, homeless people and their allies. However, it's going to take more than simply providing social services or changing policies.

It means working with homeless people and bringing their often-silenced voices to the forefront in all aspects of anti-homelessness work. As social service providers and activists, we need to constantly examine and re-examine our own organizations to critically evaluate whether or not we are serving the populations we claim to serve as best we can. And perhaps the best way we can do so is simply by asking: what do you think?

*** *** *** *** *** ***

The Suitcase Clinic wants to know your comments, concerns, and suggestions about homelessness and our clinic. Please email SuitcaseShare@gmail.com about things that you want to see changed, solutions you'd like to propose, or if you simply want to become involved with Suitcase Clinic's advocacy efforts.

Sleeping Ban Defeat in Santa Cruz Raises Many Questions

by Steve Pleich

The defeat on March 8 of the proposed amendment to the local sleeping ban by a 5-2 vote of the Santa Cruz City Council was extremely disappointing to advocates for people experiencing homelessness — but not entirely unexpected.

It was the hope of some that the passage of the amendment would, at the very least, signal a willingness on the part of the community at large to redefine the relationship between the housed and unhoused in our community, as well as present what some were calling a "once in a generation" opportunity to legitimize the basic need for and right to sleep.

One speaker at the City Council session called the proposed amendment "both sound public policy and an appeal to the better angels of our nature." Of the several dozen residents who spoke during the public comment period, only three spoke out against the amendment.

Regrettably, and again not surprisingly, the council members were not moved to have their votes reflect the voices of the people. For decades, the city has progressively sought to criminalize homelessness and the recent vote is little more than a sad confirmation of that well-established and deeply entrenched policy.

One longtime observer commented directly following the vote that "now our community is officially homeless unfriendly." And while activists and ordinary residents alike are doing considerable soul-searching, the immediate future is not without some hope.

In reaction to this latest refusal by local government officials to recognize even the most basic human rights for people experiencing homelessness, several things happened almost immediately. Some residents sent angry letters or emails to council members or issued passionate public statements decrying the council's decision.

Others, such as members of the Association of Faith Communities of Santa Cruz County, which had unanimously endorsed the amendment, organized a working group to brainstorm and consider options for further action. One positive offshoot of the amendment's defeat was the proposal of a Joint City/County Task Force on Homelessness which is being put forward, ironically enough, by three of the council members who voted against the amendment.

And though there is always understandable suspicion about the efficacy of the task force model, there is a belief that recommendations in support of revisiting previously defeated initiatives like the safe spaces sleeping program and recreational vehicle parking program, may come from the work of such a group.

Historically in Santa Cruz, we have seen both productive and negligible results from task forces, but some activists feel that a grassroots approach to developing safe sleeping spaces has not met with any significant success and so are willing to consider other more institutional options.

But there is strong disagreement as to strategy even among local activists. Says Homeless United for Friendship and Freedom (HUFF) founder Robert Norse, "We should be building on the shoulders of those who pioneered the direct action approach to homeless activism, not relying on the approval of the powerful." Many agree with Norse's point.

The resolution to create this new Task Force is set for hearing on the Santa Cruz City Council agenda on April 12, and there will certainly be extensive public input concerning formation of the group, the scope of the work, how residents can submit applications and the process by which community members will be appointed to serve. As always, we continue to live in hope.

Steve Pleich is an advocate for people experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz and Santa Cruz County.

Mike Deserves a House

Commentary by Mike Lee

I realized over breakfast this morning that I am an embarrassment to the city. Here you have public policy spending millions of dollars on people just like me. The end result is that me and mine wind up with a sandwich and maybe a mat on the floor. Once in a while, one of us maybe gets a place inside, because of factors beyond our control.

Playing the housing game is just like playing slots in Las Vegas. You put your money (or time) in, pull the handle and hope for a positive result. At least in Vegas, if you hit the jackpot you get at least a roast beef sandwich.

It seems that once you attain the status of homelessness, you become a non-person — a liability to be pandered to or criminalized. Never mind that at my age of 60, with an income and no inclination to commit crimes, do drugs or spend all my money at the liquor store, I'm still considered an object to be managed. Talked about in all sorts of ways. Seen but never acknowledged.

Recently I had the misfortune to interact with the City of Berkeley's newest scheme in combating homelessness. It's called the coordinated entry system. In a nutshell, it is supposed to be a one-stop shop for homeless services. In reality, it is piles of paper work and, quite frankly, a complete waste of time.

Keep in mind that in my particular instance, I am way over-qualified for services. This is based on federal guidelines which take into account my age, health, and length of homelessness. Not only do I score very high on these factors, I have an income and no current substance issues. I am the poster child for who society wants to see off the sidewalks of Berkeley.

When the guidelines were crafted, it was people just like me that they had in mind to provide a hand up, and not a handout.

After endless amounts of time and travel filling out stupid forms, we come to my needing to prove I'm homeless. Just being there proves a need. What, you think somebody with sufficient resources is going to go through this process for a bug-infested hotel room? "Yeah, buddy, I'm not going to pay for a nice clean place; let's go live in dirt and squalor."

Let's set that silliness aside for a moment and consider who you are interviewing. I find myself in the role of being a public figure. It's not any one thing that I've done. It's probably because I'm opinionated and have a big mouth. I meet on a regular basis with decision makers within the City of Berkeley whom for some odd reason or another think I might have something useful to say.

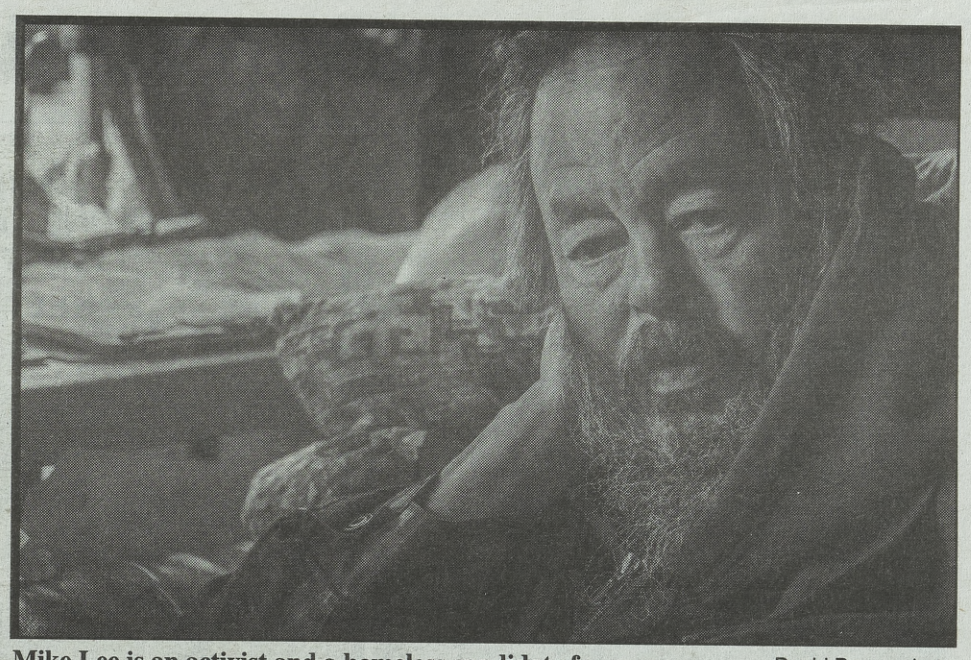
I smiled and said the form isn't necessary. Just pick up the phone and call the City, and the first person that answers, you ask them about me. I'm not just any old bum, but a candidate for mayor and a very loud advocate for the community. As such I'm sort of kind of notorious here in Berkeley.

As I walked away from this whole nonsense I thought: My gawd, if they treat me this way, think of someone in my same exact position who is largely unknown. How do they prove they are homeless?

The City's embarrassment arises from the fact that despite spending all this money, devising numerous schemes and five-year plans, ad nauseum, they still can't get one bum off the street. I am proof positive that the system is broken. That it is charity and not solution-based.

I am truly blessed that I enjoy some skill, talents and a reasonable level of intelligence. So much so that recently a member of the dark side said I was one of the more rational and reasonable people on the other side of the aisle. I don't say these things to pump up my chest, brag or think I'm special, but to point out that if you can't put me in a house, how is your system going to deal with someone of less abilities or financial resources?

The system is broken and needs to be fixed. You start by looking at this bum's situation and asking yourself this: What kind of system are we going to create to help people like Mike get a house? Not a sandwich or a pat on the head. A hand up and not a hand out.



Mike Lee is an activist and a homeless candidate for mayor. David Bacon photo

Gimme Some Truth

Compiled by Daniel McMullan

"To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men."
— *Abraham Lincoln*

"Where words fail, music speaks."
— *Hans Christian Andersen*

"Who hears music, feels his solitude
Peopled at once."
— *Robert Browning*

"I like beautiful melodies telling me terrible things."
— *Tom Waits*

"Music is the great uniter. An incredible force. Something that people who differ on everything and anything else can have in common."
— *Sarah Dessen*

"Music... will help dissolve your perplexities and purify your character and sensibilities, and in time of care and sorrow, will keep a fountain of joy alive in you."
— *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Someday we will live in peace
Tell the leaders of every land
Over and over so they understand
Military madness has gone too far
In our world today
there is no room for war.
Tell the people of all lands
Let's get together
the future is in our hands.
United nations have to agree
To say no to war, and yes to peace.
We believe in talking not fighting.
— *Country Joe McDonald*

Songs of Peace from the Vietnam Era

John Lennon: "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)"
And so happy Christmas (war is over)
For black and for white (if you want it)
For yellow and red ones (war is over)
Let's stop all the fight (now)

Creedence Clearwater Revival: "Fortunate Son"
Some folks inherit star spangled eyes
Ooh, they send you down to war,
And when you ask 'em, "How much should we give?"
Ooh, they only answer "More! More! More!"

Country Joe & the Fish: "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag"
Come on Wall Street, don't be slow,
Why man, this is war au-go-go
There's plenty good money to be ma
By supplying the Army with the tools of its trade.

Stevie Wonder: "Heaven Help Us All"
Heaven help the child who never had a home,
Heaven help the girl who walks the street alone
Heaven help the roses if the bombs begin to fall,
Heaven help us all.

The Kinks: "20th Century Man"
This is the age of machinery, a mechanical nightmare,
The wonderful world of technology,
Napalm, hydrogen bombs, biological warfare,
This is the twentieth century, but too much aggravation
It's the age of insanity.

Bob Dylan: "Masters of War"
Come you masters of war/ You that build all the guns
You that build the death planes/ You that build all the bombs
You that hide behind walls/ You that hide behind desks
I just want you to know/ I can see through your masks.

O'Jays: "When the World's at Peace"
When the world's at peace will it still be in one piece?
I pray for the day when the bombs and the bullets cease
Come let's make a change, or leave the world in dust
Let's be the world of love for the ones that follow us

Phil Ochs: "I Ain't Marching Anymore"
For I flew the final mission in the Japanese sky
Set off the mighty mushroom roar
When I saw the cities burning I knew that I was learning
That I ain't marching anymore

Marvin Gaye "What's Going On"
Father, father, we don't need to escalate
You see, war is not the answer
for only love can conquer hate

Edwin Starr: "War"
Ohhh, war, I despise
Because it means destruction of innocent lives
War means tears to thousands of mothers eyes
When their sons go to fight and lose their lives
I said, war, huh Good God, y'all
What is it good for? Absolutely nothing!

The Doors: "The Unknown Soldier"
Unborn living, living, dead/ Bullet strikes the helmet's head
And it's all over for the unknown soldier
It's all over for the unknown soldier

Curtis Mayfield "We Got to Have Peace"
And the soldiers who are dead and gone,
If only we could bring back one,
He'd say "We've got to have peace"
To keep the world alive and war to cease

Buffy Sainte-Marie: "Universal Soldier"
He's five feet two and he's six feet four
He fights with missiles and with spears
He's all of thirty-one and he's only seventeen
He's been a soldier for a thousand years

Bobby Darin: "Simple Song of Freedom"
Come and sing a simple song of freedom
Sing it like you've never sung before
Let if fill the air, tell the people everywhere
We, the people here, don't want a war."

Holly Near: "It Could Have Been Me"
"Students in Ohio two hundred yards away
Shot down by a nameless fire one early day in May
Some people cried out angry
"You should have shot more of them down"
But you can't bury youth my friend
Youth grows the whole world round.
It could have been me, but instead it was you
So I'll keep doing the work you were doing
As if I were two

Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by **American Friends Service Committee.** The vendor program is run by **J.C. Orton.**

Editor, Layout: Terry Messman
Web content: Jesse Clarke
Human Rights: Carol Denney

Contributors: Ellen Danchik, Carol Denney, Mike Lee, Sam Lew, Daniel McMullan, Jim Marshall, Betsy Morris, Steve Pleich,

All works copyrighted by the authors.
The views expressed in *Street Spirit* articles are those of the individual authors, not necessarily those of the AFSC.

Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, artwork, poems and photos.
***Contact*: Terry Messman**
Street Spirit, 65 Ninth Street,
San Francisco, CA 94103
***E-mail*: spirit@afsc.org**
***Web:* www.thestreetspirit.org**

Too Cute to Fail? A Critical Look at Tiny Houses

by Carol Denney

A friend reminded me recently that when Senator Dianne Feinstein was mayor of San Francisco, she thought that homelessness was going to be a brief phase, and one proposal floating through town was the idea of mobile cement drain pipes to be used as temporary shelters.

The Department of Public Works was already adept at carting them around; and they were too heavy to steal, unbreakable, semi-private, washable, and available. And if you think this is a little nutty, you'll have a sense of my response to tiny houses, the movement for miniature abodes sometimes promoted as one solution to the housing crisis.

My friend said that all the contractor proposing the drain pipe shelters was requesting from the city was "a plot to put them on." And I thought, well, golly. Is that all? Because that's what Liberty City, the community of tents on Berkeley's old City Hall lawn, was requesting. And that's what the people in tents under the Division Street freeway overpass were requesting after being flushed away from San Francisco's Market Street Super Bowl celebration area.

That's what the community of people living on the Albany Bulb was requesting, before Albany officials and the police evicted them. That's what people ferrying what little they have left to call their own have been requesting of cities nationwide for decades, along with their human rights and perhaps a little compassion.

Most communities of homeless people are having the door slammed on such requests, and it isn't because tents aren't aesthetically appealing. Liberty City was a monument to cleanliness, orderliness, cooperative living and indigenous democratic organization, much more so than most apartment buildings or even co-ops, and the famously liberal City of Berkeley still swept it away.

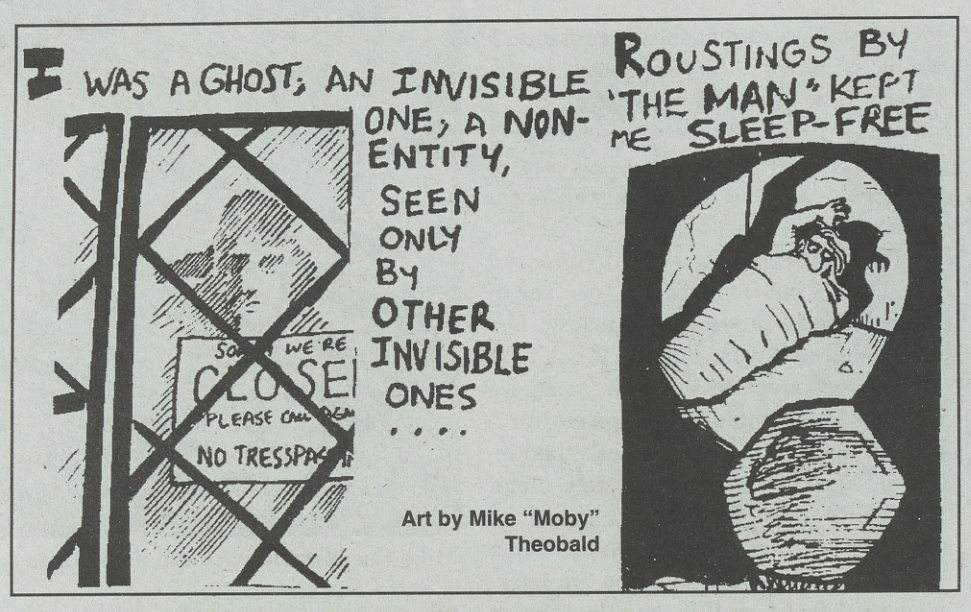
I know what tiny houses do: they hit you square in the cute. The little windows, the cunning shingles, the seductive implication that the smaller your house's footprint the "greener" you are. In the nebulous background of tiny house presentations is something unidentifiable which seems to make even the most intelligent people I know go weak in the knees because they just can't wait to put the tiny curtains up in the tiny house.

There are several curious implications that seem to enter the room with any discussion of tiny houses which I find myself unable to accept as easily as everyone around me. What issue does the miniaturization of housing solve for anyone except developers, who are the more obvious voices pressuring city planning departments into accepting more and more density with less and less living space and amenities?

"Curbed San Francisco" has a website which illustrates the developer angle for miniaturization in an article by Tracy Elsen published on April 9, 2015. Local developer Patrick Kennedy is referred to as a "Micro Maven" for proposing 395-square-foot "affordable rentals" for a development south of Market Street not far from the Division Street tents. The article refers to him as "best known for developing teensy but livable micro-units."

In Berkeley, he is better known for snookering a gullible Berkeley City Council into giving him generous opportunities to ignore height restrictions and waive pesky requirements on the grounds that his buildings would replace theaters or provide cultural spaces most of which proved theatrically, culturally, or financially unworkable, having been designed primarily as Potemkin villages.

There is no mechanism for making sure these micro-apartments aren't snapped up by people who need a San Francisco pied-a-terre in town for a quick change of clothes while their real lives, their family lives and community lives, are lived somewhere over the bridges where they can grow some carrots in the back yard.



Art by Mike "Moby" Theobald

Let me clarify that I love the tiny houses. They hit me right in the Betty Crocker Easy-Bake Oven. But with all due respect to the people who have built small, portable houses of recycled materials (or buffalo hides) for centuries, one 264-square-foot micro unit hit the San Francisco market this past December for the "affordable" price of $425,000.

Developers are better than any of the rest of us at capitalizing on the housing crisis, and are no more likely to be motivated by honest human needs and long-term community planning than the enthusiastic college students who compete for annual prizes with their tiny house designs, houses in which they have no plans to actually live.

Tiny houses are not necessarily any more problematic than a tent. But the day my city allows the person with the $10,000 to $80,000 tiny house a city-sanctioned public space for his or her charming mini-abode, I will be there demanding that the person with less than $10,000 and only a charming tent be allowed the same privilege, and I hope I will not be alone.

I don't want to see either the housing crisis, the cute factor, or both used to create a new tier of underclass in towns as yet unable to see people struggling on the streets as refugees from a federal, state, and municipal housing policy which created the horror of homelessness out of the whole cloth of greed.

Focusing on the cunning curtains on the adorable windows of the tiny house without first securing the human rights many cities increasingly subtract from the poor strikes me as falling right out of the developer's or planner's playbook, where individual solutions are prized and larger, collective visions are just somehow too complex for contemplation. The issue isn't the size (or cuteness) of the house, tent, or place you roll out your sleeping bag and hang your washed-out socks in the nearby tree.

It's the unwillingness of your town, city, landowner or public official to allow you to be there at all. I'm hoping the seduction of miniaturization doesn't distract from the call for a right to rest, for human rights, and for housing based on the needs of minimum-wage workers, people with disabilities, veterans, and low-income seniors who can't compete in a market designed by and for the one percent.

Tiny houses fall suspiciously into the basket of misconceptions one often hears at planning meetings and zoning hearings most people don't have time to attend:

1. The misconception that there is not enough land, resources, money to address the housing crisis. This is nonsense. We are a wealthy nation capable of housing the poor. One should never confuse an absence of resources with an absence of political will.

2. The misconception that tiny houses' "cute quotient" will overpower issues of planning and zoning such that that the necessary square footage will just magically manifest. Again, this is nonsense, with all due respect to pet developers' projects' peculiar success on politically packed citizen commissions.

3. The misconception that poor people (and apparently nobody else) should start living their lives in miniature. This is not just nonsense, it is offensive.

People just seem to love the idea of these houses being small, as though poor people somehow need less room than other people. As though they would need less room to cook, less need to have bookshelves, less need to have friends over for a meal, etc. Hidden in these assumptions is an assumption that people who have gone through a period of grinding poverty need less light, less space, less access to computers, art supplies, pianos, companionship, room for their children, etc. I would argue the opposite.

The main market for tiny houses is wealthy people: land owners and homeowners hoping to situate a temporary guest room where the garden tool shed now resides in an ample backyard and need to coax considerable flexibility and baskets of variances from their local city council, zoning board, and planning commission to do so. The severe subdivision of lots in residential areas, however greased by the housing crisis, looks a lot less green when one factors in the impact on resources for the rest of the neighborhood in the same ways and for the same reasons that loose rules about Airbnb's short-term rentals take a neighborhood toll without housing the poor.

Live in a teacup if you like, I would say to tiny house proponents, those who aren't frankly angling to capitalize on the human need for shelter or jousting enthusiastically for some academic design prize. But think deeply before requesting the miniaturization of someone else's life or needs.

An unexamined love affair with tiny houses runs the risk of creating what most developers are building anyway: housing that addresses such a minimum of human needs that the need for storage, parking, companionship, bookshelves, etc is visited upon the surrounding neighborhoods if not piled up in the yard. Neighbors of densely packed, student-filled, in no way affordable party houses can assure you that not providing parking on site doesn't preclude the inevitable impact on the surrounding streets, which fill up with the dense building residents' cars anyway while the developer, happily living in a large house in Orinda, periodically dusts the environmental prize hung by the mantel.

Do tiny houses solve human rights issues in a town which criminalizes sitting on the sidewalk, either on paper or in fact? There is no evidence of this. Do tiny houses magically create square footage for people who need to rest with their belongings without being criminalized for "camping" or "blocking" the sidewalk? There is no evidence of this. Do tiny houses address the need for public bathrooms and campgrounds? There is no evidence of this. Do they decriminalize sleeping in one's car? There is no evidence of this. Do they address the corrosive prejudice against the sight of poverty often linked to criminalization campaigns? There is no evidence of this.

The tiny house enthusiasts seem to imply that tininess, or tidiness, or ecological economy, or the mere implication of all three will solve or be part of a solution to homelessness. If this were the case, Liberty City would have been celebrated instead of swept away by the Berkeley City Council after its brief weeks of existence a few months ago. Most of Liberty City's tents took up less space than the smallest tiny house, and the green qualities of shared cooking and recreational resources are obvious.

Liberty City was absurdly tidy, and began with several donated tents which were identical, kind of an aesthetic cherry on top for those charmed by uniformity. The residents swept the grounds and corrected the corners of papers on the information tables. It was public land, presumably already dedicated to address the public good. The need for people with nowhere to go to organize together for their own safety is a public good, a necessity, and slowly being officially recognized as a right.

Liberty City was close to three outdoor restrooms in the park across the street, near the shelter (which ran out of room) near food giveaways, near the library, near transit, etc., which any sensible city concerned about public health issues should admit made its location ideal. But Berkeley booted it without bothering to provide alternatives for the people it served.

Again, I have no opposition in particular to miniature houses which tickle the toy box in everybody. But I am noticing that the enthusiasm for tiny houses always seems to sidestep the need for tent communities, campgrounds, RV parks, etc., not to mention low-income housing. If Berkeley and San Francisco sweep away tent cities, doesn't it seem a little absurd to think that they would join in celebratory dances for tiny houses just because they're adorable?

I would feel differently about this tiny house enthusiasm if we had already won the right to rest in public spaces, the right for people to sleep in their own cars, the obligation of cities with no low-income housing options to provide free public campgrounds, etc. But it worries me that without these fundamentals, the "tiny house" enthusiasm diverts more sensible efforts into a holding pattern for good wishes and intentions which never honestly materialize for the enormous majority of people in need.

It is never an either/or issue in this world. We can have tiny houses and civil rights, tiny houses and low-income housing, tiny houses and public campgrounds; one does not preclude the other. But make sure your public campgrounds and human rights issues come first, or run the risk of having human housing needs boutiquified for the gain of a handful of profiteers. And please consider that many people, especially people already doubled up in studio apartments intended for single individuals and families trying to make do in one-bedroom apartments, have been living in miniature for decades.

A Wide Variety of Tiny Homes Across the Country

by Betsy Morris

Members of Youth Spirit Artworks and the Berkeley Tiny Home Village Study Group on a field trip to the PLACE for Sustainable Living in Oakland, where tour guide Nik Bertullis and others offer workshops on building tiny homes out of recycled wood and used, half-sized shipping containers.

The tiny house movement has reached a critical mass — and the folks who are bringing it into public view aren't the do-it-yourself builders, urban homesteaders, idealistic architects, or proponents of simple living, whether voluntary or not. It's the homeless activists and advocates, often inspired by religious values or the Occupy movement around the country, who are announcing some new Tiny Home Village every month or so now. The Bay Area may be catching up shortly. Here are a few stories for your consideration.

Dateline Berkeley, Thursday, March 31, 2016. Mary, Dana Ryan, Michaela and Maya are just a few of the 20 or so sharing ideas for a tiny home village. There's a city-owned vacant lot in West Berkeley that's looking like a possible candidate for their own little cohousing community, a vest-pocket neighborhood of 8 tiny homes and a common house.

Many of the youth live in shelters or couch-surf. They're all part of Youth Spirit Artworks, a special place where they can go while juggling jobs, school, recovery, and living in temporary shelters that require that they leave every morning and not return until evening.

They've just finished their first meeting with Berkeley City Councilmember Darryl Moore — a free-ranging and kind of frustrating discussion about gentrification, racial change, homeownership, and culture shock, and an analysis of who is doing what to help fund more resources for youth living in shelters in Berkeley.

They already know they want a hand in building the village. Eloquent and probing, these youth explore the possibilities and challenges of self-governance, of choosing members, and living cooperatively in close quarters.

They ask probing questions and attempt to visualize the possibilities.

"What if we had a counselor living there, or on call nearby?" "We could buddy up and have 'safe words' to let each other know when we're about to melt down so we don't take it out on each other." "What about a little room where we could let it all out?" "I know someone from the city who said we could get a portable building for a common house." "If we could raise money for counselors or teachers to help us, we could create jobs!" "Maybe we can hire folks we know who are trying to get their certificate, but just missed a point on the test, and need more experience."

"Should we ever call the police? That doesn't feel safe." "Only if someone really can't keep our agreements and they might harm someone, then the police can handle that." "Should it just be for kids in recovery? Or ones with jobs?" "We could help each other find jobs — there's a lot of them down there." "It's easy to bike around in Berkeley, and it's not too far to the bus straight to Oakland, if you had a place to lock up bicycles inside a gate." "But there are so many people who need help: let's remember to give back to the community."

The Youth Spirit Artworks team, members of the Liberty City experiment like Mike Zintz and Mike Lee, and other homeless activists and affordable housing advocates in the Berkeley Tiny Home Villages Study Group will be attending City Council meetings to push for rapid action on the promises of the Emergency Shelter measure passed in January. Look for more news ahead!

On November 21, 2014, the nonprofit Occupy Madison (OM) got their Occupancy Permit for a Village of up to nine tiny homes. On November 22, the OM team helped the first villagers move in. Betty and Chris had been living in their own tiny house for nearly a year on the street without running water or electricity, moving every 24 or 48 hours to comply with parking requirements. Their little house on a trailer now shares water, electricity, flush toilets, showers, laundry, a kitchen and more with four other households. The village is governed by members of OM, including the residents.

Occupy Madison raised funds to buy an old garage/gas station, convert the building to workshops and meeting space, and get permits for OM Village. Twenty-three homeowners nearby resisted the project with a petition based on unfounded fears and misguided hostility. The City Councilmember stuck by his support, and a year later, neighbors acknowledged that, in fact, the neighborhood looked better and felt better.

The formerly homeless members of the Village share representation on the Board of Occupy Madison. Each one signs a community agreement to be a good neighbor, and within the first year, one of the residents was asked to leave for "egregious" violations. It was a hard decision; the president of the Board and OM Village member abstained.

Occupy Madison Village is based on Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon. What started as homeless activists claiming space under a bridge in downtown Portland has now grown into a 60-person village with tiny homes built of recycled materials by residents and volunteers.

Community members practice self-governance, selecting their own fellow members under their own community agreements in partnership with a nonprofit sponsor that helps with negotiations with the city which owns the land.

It is further from downtown jobs and services, and by the terms of their land lease with the city, residents can only stay for two years (except for those who handle important day-to-day responsibilities as volunteer staff). But, there is a lot of mutual support for recovery, job placement, transit passes, and the like. One of the hardest things, according to a student researcher at MIT, is the lack of privacy over the porta-potties and shared showers. A little more space and a little more soundproofing could go a long way.

Opportunity Village in Eugene, Oregon, was also inspired by Dignity Village and the Occupy movement. The instigator, Andy Heber, a young city planner, researched and wrote *Tent City Urbanism,* an excellent book that combines a contemporary history of homeless encampments, and a guide to creating a self-governing tiny home village.

Heber cites the influence of cohousing design and intentional communities, as well as classic patterns of village councils behind the development of Opportunity Village. The Village is on land approved and leased by the city, on the outskirts of Eugene in a commercial/light industrial neighborhoods. Car parking (mostly for visitors or staff) is off to the side.

[For more information on these self-governing tiny home villages see www.VillageCollaborative.com or www.Foursquarevillages.com and www.tentcityurbanism.com]

A couple hours north of Eugene is Quixote Village in Olympia, Washington. It is also on land leased by the city, but a lot of money went into grading the land, moving dirt, building 30 tiny houses and a large, permanent office and commons building. Quixote Village is sponsored by a faith-based nonprofit called Panza. Panza set up the village with input from a group of homeless men over several years of talks. That village is not self-governing. Members are selected by a professional manager who can request drug tests and evict members who don't follow through on problems they are causing.

Here in California and the Bay Area, we don't have legal pathways to tiny home villages yet, but a few pioneers are working on that. Mobile homes, campers, trailers, manufactured homes, RVs, house-cars, converted trucks, vans, houseboats, and backyard sheds have been codified as uninhabitable or zoned nearly to the point of extinction. (Mobile Home parks are protected in the state like an endangered species.)

Creating community is something former homeless artists/activists out on the Albany Bulb knew well. However, there are also "sustainability pioneers" who have found ways to create tiny home villages behind the fences in commercial and industrial areas.

Fresno has become the first city in California to legalize tiny homes for backyard cottages. The City of Fresno has started the process of change. As of January 3, 2016, property owners in residential neighborhoods with an existing home can add one tiny home in the backyard to the types of secondary structures they can rent or live in.

These recently added tiny homes are defined as registered RVs with at least 100 square feet of first-floor living space, with legal kitchen and bath, that can be towed but not driven.

DEFINITIONS

Despite enormous free documentation by the National Tiny House Association, numerous blogs, articles, books, documentaries, and meet-up groups of tiny house fans around the country, the media is struggling to understand what tiny homes are. One national paper said tiny houses were 1000 square feet or less. The *San Francisco Chronicle,* in a recent article in mid-March, identified tiny homes as 300 to 500 square feet. No, no, no!

Let's get a few things straight. The tiny house movement, by and large, is about free-standing structures small enough and light enough to tow behind your basic pick-up truck, using wood (preferably natural and re-used), not the plastic and aluminum of your basic RV, camper or van, although used shipping containers and converted buses and vans can be admitted to the fold.

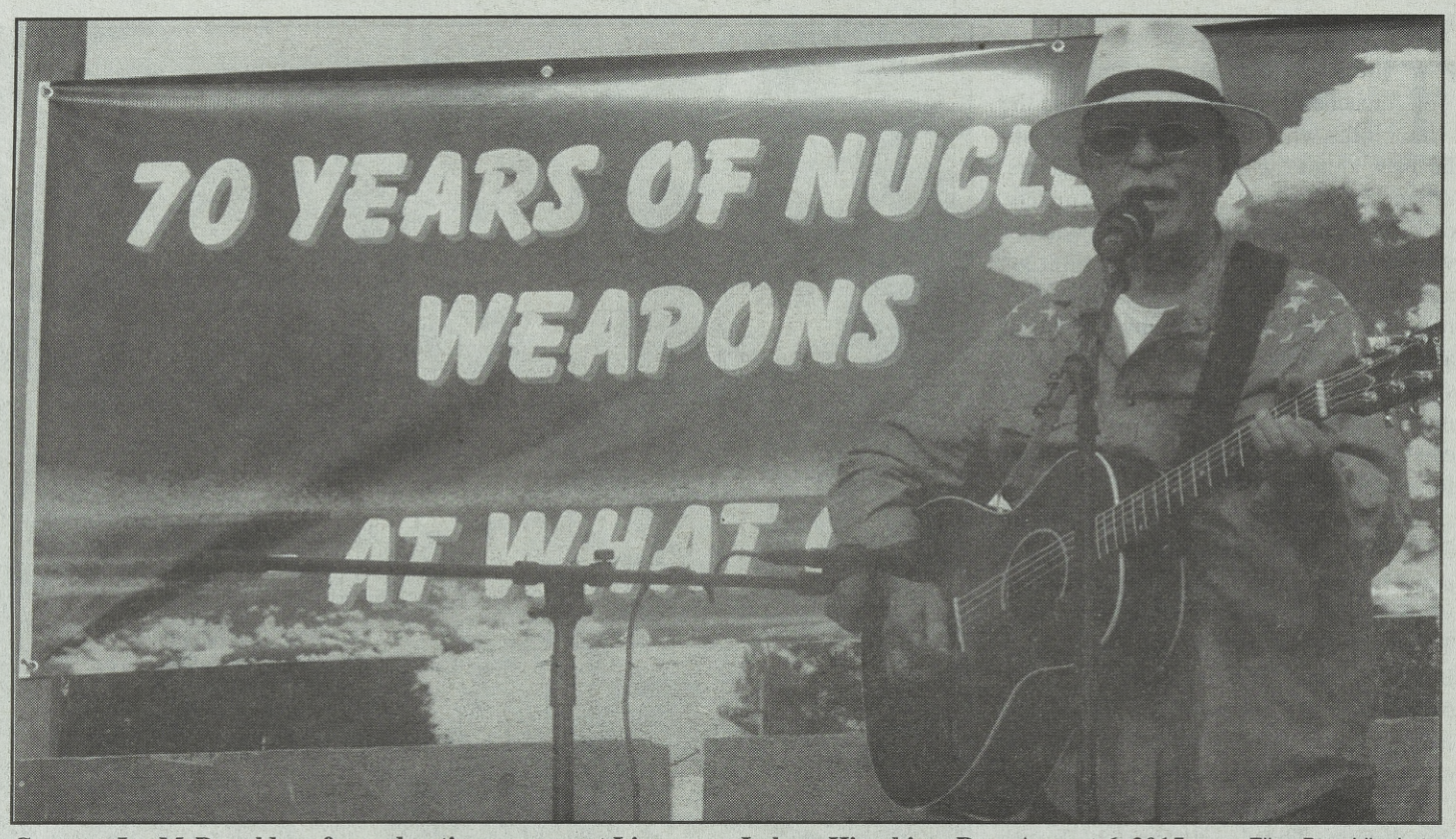
So here are some basics: A tiny home that is legally towable by a lightweight truck constrains you to a structure 8 feet wide and 20 feet long, or 160 square feet. But those trailers are pretty expensive, often the single largest expense, in fact.

There's a lot of competition in the tiny house world to find the most artful, efficient, and functional gadgets (furniture, utility systems, boat heaters, composting toilets) to live comfortably and beautifully in a space designed to fit the owner like a glove. All that and the charm too.

So many fully featured tiny homes (with bath and kitchen) might go as low as 75 square feet, while ones without amenities (basically a shed) may be even smaller (8 by 8 feet or 6 by 9 feet.) Some people even make smaller ones, basically something you can tow by bicycle, a lockable box with a window or glass door. If you want examples of those, go to Wood Street in Oakland; along the line from American Steel north to Emeryville, you can see these little boxes mixed up with tents and tarps balanced precariously on the curb in front of a mile of chain-link fence protecting acres of California native weeds from the humans.

Country Joe McDonald, Singing Louder Than the Guns

by Terry Messman



Country Joe McDonald performed anti-war songs at Livermore Lab on Hiroshima Day, August 6, 2015. Ellen Danchik photo

Country Joe McDonald composed one of the most acclaimed peace anthems of the Vietnam era, "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag," a rebellious and uproarious blast against the war machine. The song's anti-war message seems more timely than ever, with its savagely satirical attack on the arms merchants, the military and the White House.

"Fixin' to Die Rag" condemns the architects of war and the military-industrial complex in bitterly sarcastic terms.

"Come on Wall Street, don't move slow
Why man, this is war au-go-go!
There's plenty good money to be made
By supplying the Army
With the tools of the trade."

Recently, the authors of a major new book, *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War,* ranked hundreds of Vietnam-era songs and listed "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" by Country Joe and the Fish as one of the top two most important songs named by Vietnam veterans, right after "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" by the Animals.

"The soldiers got it," wrote co-authors Craig Werner and Doug Bradley about Country Joe's song. Michael Rodriguez, an infantryman with the 2nd Batallion, 1st Marines, said: "Bitter, sarcastic, angry at a government some of us felt we didn't understand — 'Fixin' to Die Rag' became the battle standard for grunts in the bush."

McDonald explained his song's popularity among the GIs by saying that he himself was "a veteran first and hippie second" and had written the song for the troops. "It comes out of a tradition of GI humor in which people can bitch in a way that will not get them in trouble, but keeps them from insanity."

McDonald first performed "Fixin' to Die Rag" on the streets of Berkeley in 1965 as a folksinger. He soon was singing it on a stage at Woodstock in August 1969 while an audience of 300,000 sang along, stood up and erupted in cheers.

McDonald then sang his anti-war anthem at one of the largest peace protests in the nation's history on April 24, 1971, as 250,000 people sang along with him at a massive peace rally on the steps of the Capitol building in Washington, D.C.

Fifty years later, showing that the song retains its power and relevance, McDonald sang it on Hiroshima Day, August 6, 2015, at an anti-nuclear protest at Livermore Laboratory. He sang it again on Veterans Day, 2015, at Berkeley's celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Berkeley Vietnam War Memorial — a veterans memorial that McDonald had been instrumental in creating.

"Fixin' to Die Rag" has been heard by millions, yet few people are aware of the exceptional body of songs McDonald has recorded over the past 50 years on the great issues of war and peace.

He has written passionately about the suffering of children caught in U.S. bombing raids ("An Untitled Protest"); soldiers dying in massive numbers in battle ("The March of the Dead"); veterans dying of exposure to Agent Orange ("Secret Agent"); arms merchants who profit from war ("The Munition Maker"); and combat nurses suffering from post-traumatic stress ("The Girl Next Door").

He has sung black-humor blasts against the insanity of hydrogen bombs ("Please Don't Drop That H-Bomb On Me"); and sardonic put-downs of the two presidents who deceived the nation about the Vietnam War: Lyndon B. Johnson ("Superbird") and Richard Nixon ("Tricky Dicky").

His songs have exposed the inhumanity of war at a depth that few other prominent musicians have ever explored. He is nearly alone among the musicians of his generation in staying true to his principles — still singing for peace, still denouncing the brutality of war, and still performing at peace actions and veterans events.

As music journalist Bruce Eder wrote in *AllMusic,* McDonald has become "almost a mythic figure in agitprop music since the early '80s, when he resumed his peace-activist work — like some Tom Joad-like character, wherever the American government seems hell-bent on turning troops loose to kill people, he's there with his music, trying to answer the call to arms with something else."

Country Joe McDonald created two of the most important album-length song-cycles about war and peace ever recorded — *Vietnam Experience* and *War, War, War*. The tremendously powerful songs that make up these two CDs should be as widely known as "Fixin' to Die Rag." As Shakespeare wrote, "He is come to open the purple testament of bleeding war."

"An Untitled Protest"

Country Joe and the Fish recorded "An Untitled Protest," on their third album, *Together*. While "Fixin' to Die" was rollicking and hilarious, "An Untitled Protest" is as different as day from night. It is a profound poetic meditation, a haunting song of sorrow for the children killed in U.S. bombing raids by "silver birds" that blindly drop anti-personnel weapons on "shores they've never seen."

The song is a mournful drone, building in intensity into a major statement against the war machine. Like most of McDonald's peace songs, "Untitled Protest" is more human-hearted than political, guided not by ideology, but by the response of conscience to the tragedy of war.

The lyrics are a point-blank gaze into the Vietnam War that witnesses everything: the "red and swollen tears" falling from the eyes of a child caught in a bombing attack, the oxen slaughtered as uncomprehending casualties, and the soldiers who kill people "as they hide." In an image that remains unforgettably in my mind decades after I first heard this song, U.S. soldiers are "Khaki priests" who "ride a stone Leviathan across a sea of blood."

He didn't blame the troops for the war, yet he refused to look away from the deaths of children and civilians in U.S. bombing raids. In the final verse, he warns that "those who took so long to learn the subtle ways of death, lie and bleed in paddy mud with questions on their breath."

That is what this song achieves: It raises questions about the terrible mystery of war and death. In McDonald's interview with *Street Spirit*, he likened his role as a songwriter to a Greek chorus asking the disturbing questions that must be raised.

"Kiss My Ass"

McDonald's songs of war and peace are unusual in that many are written from the point of view of soldiers in combat zones. "Kiss My Ass," a song from his *Vietnam Experience* album, is sung in the voice of a working-class kid who can't stomach the Army officers when they tell him that "thinking for yourself is a crime." McDonald himself was once an 18-year-old, working-class kid serving in the military, and his personal experience of being trapped in that system surely enabled him to write this song.

The officers tell him: *"Shut your mouth, son, get back in line. We're sending you to Southeast Asia."* The feisty kid responds with a scorching blast against the Army that lots of drafted soldiers would have dearly loved to say.

"I said one, two, three, four,
We don't want your fucking war.
A, B, C, D,
Get someone else — hey, don't get me.
Left, right, left, right,
The whole damn thing puts me uptight."

"One, two, three, four," is done in the rhythm of a military chant. It's catchy, like the chants led by drill instructors to get soldiers to march in formation. But the chant in this song helps soldiers question marching in formation — and the entire military.

"Agent Orange Song"

"The Agent Orange Song," written by Muriel Hogan and sung with deep feeling and conviction by McDonald, is an anthem for countless veterans silently stalked and destroyed by the chemical defoliant after they returned from the war.

It tells the story of a 17-year-old boy shipped to Vietnam and exposed to the deadly dioxin in the defoliant — exposed as well to the deadly deception of U.S. government officials who lied about the lethal effects of Agent Orange.

"We'd hike all day on jungle trails
through clouds of poison spray,
And they never told me then that it
would hurt my health today."

Agent Orange went on killing countless Vietnamese civilians long after the war ended, and the U.S. government's irresponsible and criminal use of the defoliant destroyed its own soldiers as well.

"But I got the news this morning,
the doctor told me so,
They killed me in Vietnam
and I didn't even know."

Agent Orange can take years and years before it springs its lethal trap, causing cancer of the liver and Hodgkin's Lymphoma and other fatal illnesses.

The song ends with an unexpected and stirring call for resistance. It just floors the unsuspecting listener when a tragic story about Agent Orange suddenly turns into a call to rebellion by the vet's own children.

"I'd be so proud to hear my kid say,
Hell no, I won't go!
Because you killed my dad in Vietnam
and he didn't even know."

"Vietnam Veteran Still Alive"

"Vietnam Veteran Still Alive" tells the story of a son so stirred by his father's service in World War II that he enlists in the military, thinking Vietnam will be a great adventure. Once in the jungle, he learns that "the real thing can be a living hell." McDonald's song captures the nightmarish experiences of a generation of soldiers sacrificed in Southeast Asia.

"I saw so many lose their bodies
and their minds
in the jungles and blood of Vietnam."

When the soldier survives and finally returns from the war, rather than being welcomed home as his father was welcomed after World War II, he finds to his despair that he is treated as an enemy.

"Well, I come home from a war
To a war at home,
And I can't help but wonder
what it was I've done.
I went off to fight the enemy
I'm back home, and the enemy is me."

With those lyrics, McDonald gave voice to many Vietnam veterans who felt rejected and dishonored by a nation that blamed them for a war gone wrong.

McDonald got involved in Vietnam veterans organizations and was instrumental in establishing veterans memorials in San Francisco and Berkeley. He played benefit concerts across the nation for veterans, spoke out against their unfair treatment, and called for long overdue healing and respect for those who served.

He concludes his song by calling on the White House to welcome them home.

"Hey, Mr. President, don't you think
it's time, to give a little thanks
to the boys from Vietnam?
Just a little something to ease all the pain
and welcome them back home again."

He still sings an anti-war message today, but it has become more complex and nuanced due to his awareness of the suffering of soldiers in war, and the nation's mistreatment of its Vietnam veterans.

It's an intriguing paradox that one of the most outspoken anti-war voices of his generation also became one of the pre-

See **Country Joe: Singing Louder** *page 7*

Country Joe Singing Louder Than the Guns

from page 6

eminent voices calling on the nation to honor its veterans. His work in this area has helped to awaken many people.

"Vietnam Never Again"

This melodic rocker is sung in the voice of a GI struck by shrapnel and locked in Long Binh Jail, a military stockade in South Vietnam. It describes the alienation of GIs against nearly every level of society — including presidents, generals, businessmen, even hippies — by setting up an effective series of contrasts showing how business leaders profited while veterans suffered from the weapons of war.

"I'd like to be a businessman
selling guns and planes
Instead of in this bunker
with rounds coming in.
I'd like to be the President
talking to the press
Instead of here in Khe Sanh
with shrapnel in my chest."

"Mourning Blues"

"Mourning Blues" is a requiem for an entire generation. It is the most beautifully affecting song on *Vietnam Experience*, a plaintive country blues that McDonald sings in an aching voice.

It's the kind of song that could have been sung as a country lament by Merle Haggard in a Bakersfield bar or as a blues ballad by Bukka White on the streets of Memphis. It's that timeless.

No rocking anti-war lyrics here, no battlefield firefights, just sorrow and emptiness at the loss of a loved one. It's a theme as old as the hills, and as sad as the blues.

"Someone I love has passed away
They're not here with me today.
"I feel so lonely and so empty
without them in my world."

It could have been written by anyone who ever lost a lover or a child or a parent, and McDonald sings it slowly, in a beautifully expressive vocal, melancholy and aching with loss.

"You miss your well when it's gone dry.
Can't stop these tears fall from my eyes."

Those words come straight from the heart of the blues, and they strike a deep chord. The lyrics are a direct echo of the Mississippi Delta blues, summoned from the past by McDonald to express the losses of a whole generation in a destructive war.

It may be a lament by a soldier who has lost his best friend on the battlefield. Or the tears of wife who has lost her husband in the war. Or the sorrow of a father and mother for a son who never returned home. Or the sense of loss of children left fatherless for the rest of their lives.

It is an elegy for every combat nurse who tended a soldier's lonely death in Vietnam, and for the sisters and brothers of veterans who wound up homeless and lost on the streets, and disappeared into oblivion. It could have been sung by the parents of students murdered by the National Guard at Kent State and Jackson State.

It's a ballad for every man and woman scarred irreparably in Vietnam. It's the longtime loneliness of the unknown soldier.

"Welcome Home"

"Welcome Home" is a joyous pop-rock song with an upbeat melody that celebrates the homecoming of Vietnam veterans. Mindful of the many women who served in Vietnam, McDonald welcomes home brothers and sisters alike.

"Welcome home, brother welcome home.
Welcome home, sister welcome home."

The song addresses the deep divisions caused by the war, but appeals for reconciliation between all sides of the conflict.

"Some refused to go
and some went away to fight.
Everyone wants to know
who was wrong and who was right."

"I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die." The second album by Country Joe and the Fish.

But the war is over, and the opposing sides may never agree, so it's time to get together and say: "Welcome home!"

McDonald was asked to write "Welcome Home" by a Navy veteran named Alan Bacall who was working on a film of a large parade held to welcome home Vietnam veterans. Since the nation had failed to welcome the soldiers returning from the war, it fell to a veteran filmmaker and a veteran songwriter to step up and say, "Welcome home."

Songs from the Slaughter Mill

In the midst of the Vietnam War, Country Joe recorded *War War War*, an eloquent set of anti-war songs with music by McDonald and lyrics from an entirely unexpected source: the poems of Robert W. Service. McDonald first released the album in 1971, and then performed it live for release on CD in 2007, at a "Peace Event and Reunion" honoring U.S. Vietnam War resisters in British Columbia.

Service called his poems "songs from the slaughter mill." The collaboration between the "Bard of the Yukon" and the Berkeley acid-rocker is one of the most powerful indictments of war ever recorded.

War War War captures the anguish of soldiers cut apart by what Service calls the "ravenous guns" of war, but also expresses the regret of an arms merchant for profiting from slaughter, and the grief of a father who lost his beloved son on the battleground. The record culminates in a hellish vision of a platoon of soldiers arisen from the dead to march through a veteran's day celebration.

In describing his poem cycle, Service expresses in a single poetic couplet the nightmare of war:

"For through it all like horror runs
The red resentment of the guns."

McDonald crafted a diverse set of melodies to bring out the intense feelings in Service's remarkable poems. It is an album of wild contrasts — murderous violence and cruelty, savage laughter at the absurdity of war, and beautifully expressed feelings of love and compassion.

Robert W. Service had been a well-known author of such light, entertaining verse as "The Cremation of Sam McGee." But then he served as an ambulance driver and stretcher bearer in World War I and was awarded three medals for his wartime service. His experiences on the brutal battlefields of war, and the death of his brother Albert Service in World War I, led to a considerable deepening of his poetry.

While convalescing from the war, Service wrote *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*, a book of poems that realistically portrayed the slaughter and cruel violence he had witnessed. He captured the heartbreak of those who had lost their loved ones to war, as he had lost his brother.

"Women all, hear the call,
The pitiless call of War!
Look your last on your dearest ones,
Brothers and husbands, fathers, sons:
Swift they go to the ravenous guns,
The gluttonous guns of War."

"Young Fellow My Lad"

Perhaps it was the death of his own brother in war that enabled Service to write "Young Fellow My Lad," one of the most heartbreaking expressions of a father's love and bitter regret over the loss of his son in war. It is a deeply meaningful poem for McDonald, because he has thought and written about the anguish of families who have lost a child in war.

When the narrator's son joins the army at the age of 17 to fight in World War I, the father's first burst of pride turns to sadness and fear after his son stops writing. He misses his son unbearably and keeps a fire in his parlor burning in hopes of his return. McDonald's poignant vocal is full of empathy for the father's overwhelming love and sorrow.

The father's words of farewell to his son when he first left for war now seem like a harbinger of loss.

"God bless you and keep you,
Young fellow my lad,
You're all of my life, you know."

All too soon, the father receives the message that all parents of soldiers fear and dread. His son has fallen to "the screaming shell and the battle hell." He will never come home again.

All that is left to the father are his memories, and the hopes and dreams he once held for his son. He tries mightily to find some saving grace in his son's death, some sense that he will live on.

"So you'll live, you'll live,
Young fellow my lad,
In the gleam of the evening star,
In the wood-note wild
And the laugh of the child,
In all sweet things that are."

One might search for a very long time, and look through every song written about war in our lifetime, to find such a moving expression of the broken-hearted love of parents who have lost a child in war.

This beautiful song by McDonald and Service helps us understand one of the most shattering costs of war — the immeasurable sense of loss and the permanent heartache of parents who will never again see their child return home.

"The March of the Dead"

How else to end this song-cycle but with "The March of the Dead," a fever-dream, a nightmare-vision, part prophecy and part ghost story. At first, the song may seem the delirious ravings of battle fatigue or the hallucinations of hell. But it may also be a saving grace, with the soldiers rising from their graves to warn humanity away from the path of war.

A parade celebrates the return of the nation's triumphant troops now that the war is over. But, in truth, the war is not over. It never ended for the vast, haunted regiment of the dead — "the reeling ranks of ruin," in Service's memorable phrase. The Army of the Dead marches into the victory parade, just as they come marching in — unseen and uninvited — to cast a pall over every celebration of war.

McDonald's vocals capture the dread of that moment when the dead come home to display the horrifying costs of war.

"The folks were white and stricken,
each tongue seemed weighed with lead;
Each heart was clutched
in hollow hand of ice;
And every eye was staring
at the horror of the dead,
The pity of the men who paid the price."

Florence Nightingale once said that she could never forget the thousands of soldiers lying in forgotten graves. Robert Service witnessed the same appalling loss of life, including the loss of his own brother. He, too, could never forget.

McDonald's voice sounds haunted when he sings the words that tell us what we owe the veterans of our nation's wars.

"O God, in Thy great mercy,
Let us nevermore forget
The graves they left behind,
The bitter graves."

McDonald rescued those eloquent words from the oblivion of time. Service's poems would very likely have been lost and forgotten, except that McDonald reached back in time and rediscovered them, and then created music that gave new life to the lyrics in all their prophetic urgency. Words by Robert W. Service. Music by Country Joe McDonald.

"Peace on Earth"

Many years after the peace demonstrations of the 1960s had ended, McDonald wrote "Peace on Earth," an anti-war anthem he often sang at protests against U.S. wars of intervention in Central America and rallies against nuclear arms.

"Tell the leaders of every land
Over and over so that they understand
Military madness has gone too far
In our world today
There is no room for war."

He has never stopped singing for peace. He has spoken out against war for his entire lifetime, and also has honored the nation's military veterans, even in times of great national confusion over their role.

In describing a tribute to veterans at Berkeley's Vietnam Memorial, he wrote: "There was no anger or hostility, just complete agreement that blaming soldiers for war is like blaming firefighters for fire."

Bob Dylan once described the chimes of freedom flashing "for each and every underdog soldier in the night." Through thick and thin, McDonald has demanded that the underdog soldiers of the night be treated with compassion and justice.

In doing so, he has been an important example to the peace movement, and has expanded our concept of nonviolence to include the front-line soldiers and combat nurses. He has reminded us that an anti-war movement must find compassion for *all* the victims of war, including the ones shipped off in uniforms to faraway battlefields.

In taking this stand, he is carrying on the work of his great heroine, Florence Nightingale, who said, "I stand at the altar of the murdered men and while I live I fight their cause."

Songs of Healing by Country Joe McDonald

from page 1

went on a pilgrimage to England, visiting her home in Embley, her summer home in Derbyshire, and her gravesite at East Wellow. He journeyed to the Selimiye Barracks Hospital in Scutari (Turkey) where she cared for the victims of the Crimean War.

McDonald finally compiled a comprehensive archive of her life and times, and created a Florence Nightingale website. He recently devoted his entire archive to the UCSF Nursing School.

A Tribute to Nightingale

He also began offering a "Tribute to Florence Nightingale" that tells her story in a 50-minute musical and spoken-word performance. McDonald greatly admires Nightingale's compassion and dedication for the front-line soldiers wounded, dying and nearly forgotten.

He literally becomes her voice during this tribute, reciting her words with a fiery urgency and performing several inspiring songs about nursing. His tribute is a revelation of her works of mercy.

Florence Nightingale gave comfort to thousands of gravely ill and wounded soldiers during the Crimean War. In doing so, she created a compassionate new standard for battlefield medical care. She trained 38 volunteer nurses and 15 nuns and began nursing soldiers at Selimiye Barracks in Scutari (near Istanbul, Turkey) in November 1854. During the first brutal winter, more than 4,000 soldiers died at Scutari from battle wounds, typhus, cholera and dysentery.

In his tribute, McDonald explained that along with her pioneering role in combat nursing, Nightingale defied the patriarchy of her day to become a strong advocate for the independence and rights of women.

"In the end," McDonald said, "she was to bring a health and comfort to the sick of the world as had never been seen nor conceived of before. And to the idle and disrespected women of her time, and forever after, she brought forth a profession and work and respect and independence never seen before."

His admiration for her acts of mercy led him to a deepening understanding of her life. In his "Tribute to Florence Nightingale," McDonald said, "This woman who never had children of her own now feels the tenderness and protectiveness of a mother for the wounded, maimed and dying soldiers she calls her children."

That insight runs very deep. Nightingale was one of the rare women in Victorian England who rejected the patriarchy, rejected marriage, and chose a career of caring for dying soldiers, instead of having children of her own. She calls the dying soldiers her own children and McDonald strives to remind the world of her acts of love and mercy for her wounded "soldier-children," and her struggle to forge a new path of independence and achievement for women.

Nightingale was not only the soldier's friend. She was a fierce warrior on their behalf, and McDonald gives voice to her "state of chronic rage" against the military system that had abandoned thousands of soldiers to misery and death. With a kind of furious urgency, he recites Nightingale's description of that "long dreadful winter" in Scutari.

"I am in a state of chronic rage, I who saw men come down through all that long, dreadful winter without any other covering than a dirty blanket and a pair of old regimental trousers, when we knew the stores were bursting with warm clothing. Living skeletons, devoured by vermin, ulcerated, hopeless, speechless, dying as they wrapped their heads in their blankets and spoke never a word."

"The lady with the lamp." **Florence Nightingale at Scutari with her lamp at a patient's bedside in the Crimean War.** Lithograph of a painting by Henrietta Rae.

Down those endless lines of bleeding and moaning men walked the Lady with the Lamp. Florence Nightingale is a shining icon of mercy — a light in the darkness of war. She is an eternal part of the conscience of humanity.

As McDonald pointed out in our interview, Nightingale was known as the soldier's only friend who nursed them when they were wounded and sick, and wrote to their families when they died. No one before had done that for the families of soldiers slain in battle.

Nightingale said, "I personally tended two thousand such needless deaths in that terrible winter when the ink froze in my inkwell as I wrote those endless last letters home, when the patients' limbs and boots froze together and had to be cut apart."

McDonald's work in studying Florence Nightingale's lifelong acts of mercy and caregiving may be the culmination of his own lifelong search for answers to the great questions of war and peace. McDonald emphasizes that Nightingale denounced the system that caused the murder and destruction of countless soldiers, while offering the world a vision of compassion and caregiving.

Nightingale's vision brings together and unites the (seemingly) contrasting opposites of McDonald's own life: his fiery challenges to the war machine, on the one hand, and his great respect and support for military veterans, on the other.

On the surface, it may seem contradictory to struggle against the nation's wars while supporting and defending the soldiers that fight and die in them; but the life of Florence Nightingale shows us clearly that she, too, was in "a state of chronic rage" against the war machine, while supporting the soldiers caught up in it. It was her lifelong work to show that love and mercy must be given to all of us.

In his tribute, just before he sings his song, "The Lady with the Lamp," McDonald offers a memorable reflection on the way Nightingale's life was changed forever by the dying soldiers she could never forget.

"Florence Nightingale said she had seen hell, and because she had seen hell, she was set apart. Between her and every normal human pleasure, every normal human enjoyment, must stand the wards of Scutari. She could never forget."

And then McDonald performs one of his finest anti-war songs, and yet it is much more than that. It is a warning to all of us — and especially to civilians who have never seen battlefield casualties — of the terrible price that soldiers must pay.

His song is a beautiful portrayal of Florence Nightingale, the Lady with the Lamp, carrying her lamp every night as she walked down a four-mile row of cots 18 inches apart, tending to hundreds and hundreds of wounded and dying men.

"First they use us
And then they throw us away.
Only Miss Nightingale
Knows the price that we pay,
The lady with the lamp."

She spoke of looking so deeply into the horrors of war that she could never forget. She testified that she was never out of the hospital as she attended thousands of deaths that first winter in Scutari. McDonald says, "There were mass casualties at a level perhaps never seen before."

Down those endless lines of bleeding and moaning men walked the Lady with the Lamp. She is now an eternal part of the conscience of humanity, a light that will never die.

McDonald has done nearly everything one person can do to keep alive the memory of this legendary icon of love and mercy, a woman whose accomplishments are on the same scale as Mahatma Gandhi and Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King, but who has somehow nearly been forgotten.

His beautiful song enables us to truly see this heroic woman who brought the light of mercy into the dark wards of Scutari and, in doing so, kept alive the flickering and nearly extinguished light of humanity during that dreadful winter.

His song captures in simple words — but to breathtaking effect — the interaction of "Miss Nightingale" and a dying soldier in the lonely hospital ward.

"Excuse me please, a cup of tea,
I've such a terrible thirst.
Would you please come and sit with me,
I feel it's come to the worst.
Write my mother that I love her so,
I can't seem to hold the pen.
Take this keepsake and send it home,
To those I'll never see again."

How many of those talks did Florence Nightingale have with the wounded and sick and dying? Two thousand? Four thousand? How many letters and keepsakes did she send home to the families of soldiers who died in a strange land knowing they would never again see their loved ones? How could she endure that never-ending burden of sorrow?

McDonald began wondering why she returned home to England a national hero, yet refused to accept any recognition, refused to grant any interviews, and often chose to live in isolation. Alone, she had borne the anguish and heard the last words of countless soldiers who had no other friend in their final moments on earth. No one can ever tell what that did to her heart and mind and soul.

We can only try to dimly comprehend the price she paid. Yet she willingly paid that price time and time again, and she was a friend to the very end, as McDonald's song declares.

"She will hold his hand,
Stay with him to the end.
You know she understands.
She's the soldier's friend."

The most important value of all, the deepest and most sacred value, is mercy. Blessed are the merciful. Florence Nightingale, the lady with the lamp, is a shining icon of mercy for all humanity.

"Clara Barton"

McDonald also wrote "Clara Barton," in honor of the nurse who was known as the "Angel of the Battlefield" for nursing soldiers and setting up field hospitals during the Civil War. In the years after the war, Barton became the founder of the American Red Cross.

In his song, McDonald describes Clara Barton as a "professional angel sent from above." He wrote the song, he said, because "I despair over the lack of real women as role models." He wanted his three daughters to have "some heroes for them to think about."

"Every time in the world
someone receives first aid
You can thank Clara Barton
for the life that is saved.
She lived out her life
in a world ruled by men.
Every time they knocked her down
she got back up again."

Civil War veterans told of Clara Barton with tears in their eyes, McDonald sings, because she "braved the battle" to save their lives.

"She never ran
from the shot and the shell
Bringing aid and comfort
in the midst of hell."

The nurses written about by Country Joe McDonald add up to an Angel Band. They offer an entirely different vision of wartime heroism — a better vision — by bravely bringing mercy and healing into dangerous war zones where medical care is a matter of life and death.

Clara Barton in the Civil War, Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War, Lynda Van Devanter and Rose Sandecki in the Vietnam War, and countless other unsung heroines, have offered the light of mercy and healing in the darkest hours and the most dangerous places. They all shine on.

"It Was a Moment of Peace and Love"

The Street Spirit Interview with Country Joe McDonald

Interview by Terry Messman

Street Spirit: *You first sang "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" on the streets of Berkeley during the Vietnam War in 1965. Fifty years later, you sang it at an anti-nuclear protest at Livermore Laboratory on Hiroshima Day. Could you have imagined in 1965 that your song would still have so much meaning today?*

McDonald: Actually, I find the concept of 50 years incomprehensible. But it's indisputable because I have children and some of those children have children and I know that the math is right. And I just finished an album and the title of it is "50" because it's 50 years since the first album. It's called "Goodbye Blues." I didn't die, so there you are. I'm still alive and I'm still doing something. And filling a need helps a lot, and it keeps me sane.

Spirit: *Your songs really enlivened the Hiroshima Day protest at Livermore last summer.*

McDonald: Well, I'm glad. I've done lots of these events. I grew up in a family of radical socialists, and quite honestly, I really get bored with the theory and speechifying of various movements and philosophies from the left. It doesn't mean I don't support them. But as an entertainer, I know that you can lose your audience. I've been doing this for a long, long time, and I consider myself a morale-booster for these causes. I don't do it if I don't support the cause and the ideas and the people that are doing it. It's really quite remarkable what people are doing in many movements.

I like to support these movements, because they are sometimes not mainstream and no one else is supporting them, and so I feel an obligation to do it.

As an activist, I like to give a voice and to support people and movements that don't have mainstream support and visibility. And I realize that my name has a certain notoriety and that my presence can be a morale-booster.

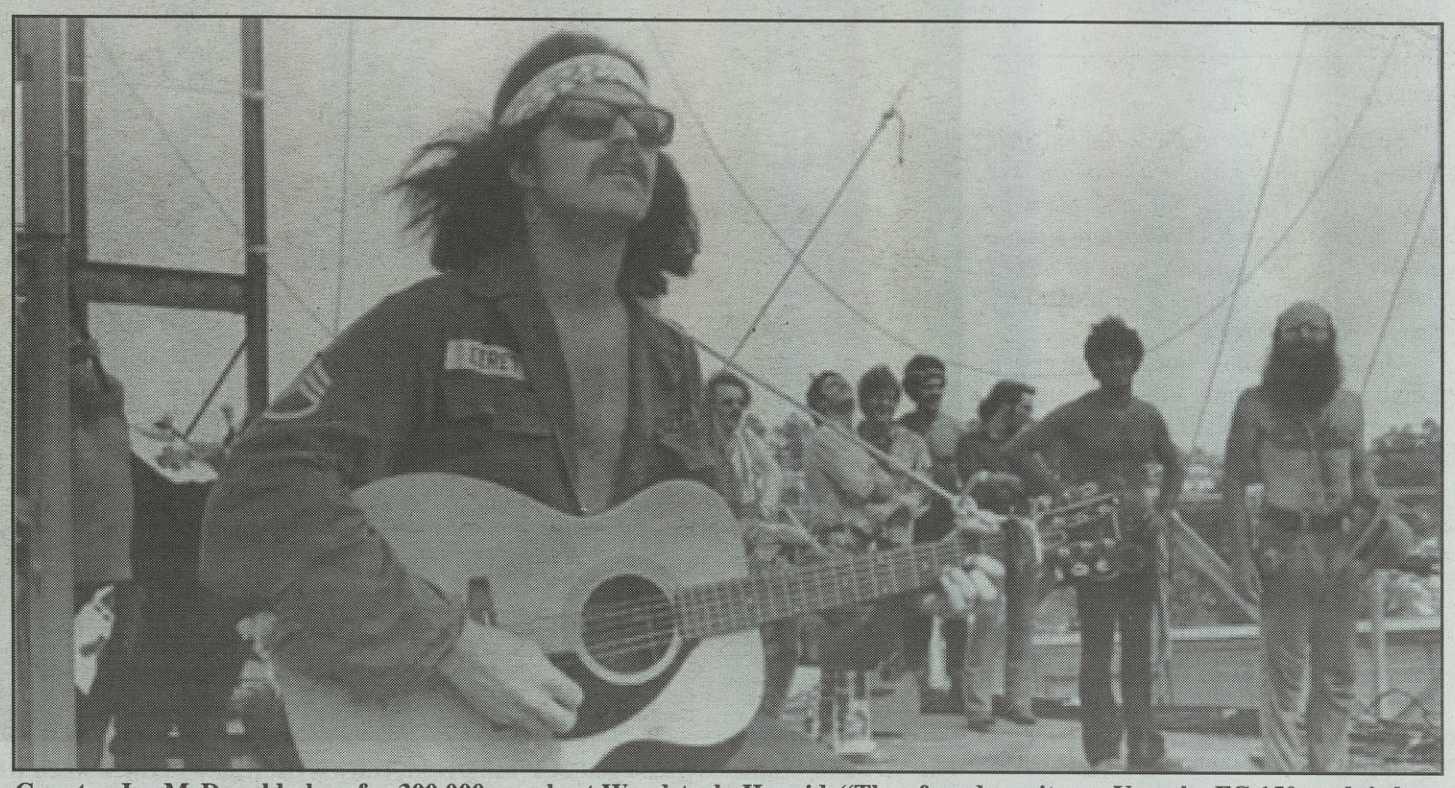
Spirit: *My wife and I were at your concert at the Freight and Salvage in Berkeley back on Nov. 7, 2014, and supposedly that was your retirement concert. Yet you're still singing all over the place.*

McDonald: Well that was a weird month. I actually did retire three months before that. I said, "This is it." And then that month I played five events, all of which were sociopolitical events, and all of which I didn't get paid any money for. And I thought, "Wow, this is a weird retirement month."

Spirit: *"I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" has kind of a perfect Berkeley origin story on the University of California's Sproul Plaza at the height of the antiwar movement. Is it true that you and Barry Melton recorded an early version of "Fixin' to Die" and began selling it on a table at Sproul Plaza in 1965?*

McDonald: Yes. I moved to Berkeley in the summer of 1965, after the Free Speech Movement. So I came up here from southern California and got miraculously tapped into the folk music thing that was happening here at that time. I met Barry Melton at the University of California folk festival, and we hit it off. I started playing a few of my songs, and he played lead guitar. We were a duo.

Then I met some other people, and ED Denson, Mike Beardslee and I started putting out a little magazine called *Rag Baby*. We put out several issues of *Rag Baby*. It was a biweekly that had music articles and schedules of things that were happening around town, music and dancing and events. It was mostly focused on folk music and the folk scene.



Country Joe McDonald plays for 300,000 people at Woodstock. He said, "They found a guitar, a Yamaha FG 150, and tied a rope on it *(see the photo)* and pushed me on stage. The rest is history." Photo credit: Jim Marshall

"The important thing about the 'Fixin' to Die Rag' was that it had a new point of view that did not blame soldiers for war. It just blamed the politicians and it blamed the manufacturers of weapons. It didn't blame the soldiers. Someone who was in the military could sing the song." – Country Joe McDonald

Then in September of 1965, the publication date came and we didn't have any copy for the magazine. You understand the problem of not having copy! The publication date came and we had nothing, even though there was a lot of stuff happening at that time.

Spirit: *Yes, didn't you release some songs instead as a musical magazine?*

McDonald: I had been approached to write some music for a play that Sara Payton had written about the Vietnam War. I was working on a song for the play about three Vietnamese revolutionary soldiers before a battle, and the lyrics were expressing their thoughts before a battle.

I had been in the Navy for three years, and being a veteran always influenced my point of view. So I wrote this song called "Who Am I?" a song that's very loved now. ["Who Am I" was released on the second Country Joe & the Fish album.]

It took two or three days to write the lyrics; it was kind of difficult. But I finally got it, and I sat back in my chair and I was just happy that I finished it and I started strumming on my guitar, and I strummed what turned into the music for the chorus of "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag." And then I started writing and I wrote the whole song in about 30 minutes. I thought it was a pretty productive day.

Spirit: *Pretty productive! You were an unknown street musician and you suddenly came up with a very moving song, "Who Am I?" and then the "Fixin' to Die Rag" that would live on as one of the most important antiwar anthems of the 1960s.*

McDonald: The only reason I could write those lyrics was having grown up in a socialist family. My parents were members of the Communist Party when I was born, but later became disenchanted with them. And then they became part of the Progressive Party and the left socialist parties that were around.

I read the leftist newspapers and I was familiar with the basic tenets of socialism about the industrial complex that generates war. So I was able to write lyrics about the warmakers that profit from war, and I was able to write a lyric from the point of view of the soldier because I had been in the military.

Also, I felt disenchanted from my parents, in a way. As far as politics, we didn't have a very good relationship, so it was easy for me to say: "Come on mothers throughout the land, pack your boys off to Vietnam." And that sarcasm was a really nice thing, and GIs love sarcasm.

The important thing about the "Fixin' to Die Rag" was that it had a new point of view that did not blame soldiers for war. It just blamed the politicians and it blamed the manufacturers of weapons. It didn't blame the soldiers. Someone who was in the military could sing the song, and the attitude is, "Whoopee, we're all going to die."

I had been in Japan in the Navy and at a certain point, I started thinking to myself, "I want to get the hell out of here." And then realizing, "Wait a minute, I can't get out of here." I have this weird (military) haircut, I have no civilian clothes, I have no money. I'd have to get a passport and get on a plane, and I'd never bought an airline ticket. I was stuck. I was screwed. And I knew that attitude. It was: "Oh well, I'm going to finish out my enlistment." And when they asked me to re-enlist, I said, "No thank you."

Spirit: *Did you find that soldiers liked "Fixin' to Die Rag" since it mocks Wall Street and the generals, but not the soldiers shipped to Vietnam?*

McDonald: Oh they love it, yeah. They really do like it because it speaks the truth. Most peace songs of the era blamed the soldiers for the war. As a matter of fact, I remember the Baez sisters (Joan Baez and Mimi Farina) had this poster with them saying, "Girls say yes to boys who say no" — in the belief that you could just say, "No, I don't want to be in this war."

But it was not that easy. As a matter of fact, it was almost impossible when you were in the military. Most civilians — even civilians on the left, which is really a crime — do not understand the Uniform Code of Military Justice. It governs you when you're in the military. It's a contract unlike any other contract. It can't really be broken.

And in times of war, they can just shoot you. The grease that makes the military run is that if you disobey a direct order in times of war, it's punishable by death. They can imprison you. People were put in Long Binh Jail in South Vietnam. They were beaten.

Spirit: *So it was easy for activists to expect GIs to resist, but they had little understanding of the risks they faced?*

McDonald: I mean, the military is a killing machine, and you have to do your job. If you think it's easy to get out of it once you're in it, you're stupid. As a matter of fact, you can be extended for as long as they want. So in that sense, it's really like being in the Mafia.

When you're in the military, you know that. I don't know that it's even possible for civilians to understand. But it's very, very important for civilians to understand the workings of the military and what the military machine entails, and I don't know if it will ever happen.

I now know more than I want to know. The situation today is quite a bit better. But in 1965, I think that most anti-war people were convinced without a doubt that the military personnel were responsible for the war, and if they would only stop fighting, the war would stop. And people demonstrated against soldiers coming back, not as much as the right wing would like us to believe, but they did.

There were very few people that embraced soldiers caught in that conundrum. The American Friends Service Committee was certainly one of them. But mostly, GIs helped themselves with the GI movement.

Spirit: *Do you think there is greater public understanding and support today for the soldiers forced to fight the wars?*

McDonald: Yes, that has changed now. I don't think anybody in the country would blame an Iraqi war veteran for the war in Iraq. That's not happening any

See **Interview with Country Joe** *page 10*

Interview with Country Joe McDonald

from page 9

longer.

Spirit: *In "Vietnam Veteran Still Alive," you wrote about a patriotic kid who went to Vietnam, but after the war, he found that "I'm back home and I'm the enemy." Do the veterans you've talked with feel they were blamed for a war they had no part in starting?*

McDonald: You know, the American Legion did not admit Vietnam veterans during the war in Vietnam and after the war in Vietnam — because they "lost the war."

Spirit: *That was really their feeling — that the soldiers lost the war?*

McDonald: That's right. They were cowards and they lost the war. I've met many, many fathers who died estranged from their sons because they couldn't stop blaming their sons for either refusing to be in the draft, or coming back after losing the war, and then speaking out against the war.

So that's the right wing and the mainstream of America. But I also have met people who were spit on and were called terrible names. My friend Jack McCloskey worked with Vietnam Veterans Against the War and was instrumental in starting the peer-group counseling that saved so many Vietnam veterans from post-traumatic stress horrors.

He always complained because he and Ron Kovic and all those Vietnam vets were put in the vanguard of the peace actions. Once the left wing decided that they were potent symbols and a force to be reckoned with as far as the anti-war movement was concerned, they put them in the front of the march. They *always* put them in the front of the march, and Jack McCloskey said, "So we always got beat up." They sacrificed them. The country sacrificed them by sending them to Vietnam, and the left wing sacrificed them by putting them in the front of the marches.

Spirit: *Many activists admired the VVAW, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, for becoming such a strong part of the movement in the late '60s and early '70s. But is that really what they felt, that the movement was using them?*

McDonald: Yeah, that's right. And that's why VVAW broke away from the peace movement and started doing their own thing. That turned to storefront counseling, with vets helping vets. And by the way, it's because of those people working together that we now have the only treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Now, because of Vietnam veterans, we also understand firefighters, rape survivors — the list is endless. The only thing that works for them is people with common traumas talking to each other.

Spirit: *Peer counseling for people suffering from PTSD?*

McDonald: Yes. Peer counseling.

Spirit: *How did veterans first develop what you describe as the only treatment for PTSD?*

McDonald: They organized storefront rap groups because the Veterans Administration would not recognize this issue. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual at the time did not define Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a mental condition. Therefore, you could not get treatment for PTSD from the Veterans Administration. You could not get treatment anywhere.

The Vietnam Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C., is dedicated to the women who served in the Vietnam War, most of whom were nurses. It depicts three uniformed women with a wounded soldier. It was designed by Glenna Goodacre.

"These women coming home from the Vietnam War, they had no peer group. They started to form their own peer groups. And they never were the same after their wartime experiences. They were shoved into a horrific, unbelievable experience, and that's what I wrote about in the song."

Spirit: *I think about all the World War II veterans who suffered what they called shell shock and battle fatigue back then. Millions were badly damaged by the war and they went untreated and unrecognized.*

McDonald: They sent them back lots of times, when they were shell-shocked. They sent them back.

Spirit: *The military sent them back to the front lines?*

McDonald: Back to the front lines. And in World War I, they sent them back. They would burn them with cigarettes and beat them up and stuff and call them cowards. It's tragic and it's horrible. It is just so horrible.

Spirit: *For a voice of antiwar protest, you express an unusual amount of empathy for the experience of soldiers. Does that come from being a veteran?*

McDonald: I could write the songs that I write because I was a military veteran and my parents were socialists. Also my mother, Florence McDonald, was Jewish, and her mother was an immigrant from Russia, escaping the pogroms of the Czar. And her father was also an immigrant from Russia.

So by a very early age, I understood the Holocaust and the reality of the Holocaust — the death camps, the person who made sofas out of the skin of Jews. And my mother told me, "When the pogroms come, they'll get you."

So I've never believed that I was safe, which is another element. I could identify completely with soldiers in Vietnam not feeling safe, surrounded by death, with people hunting them and wanting to kill them. Because, you know, Nazis wanted to kill Jews. They wanted to put them in cages and fry them and kill them. So that is imprinted in my mind and is part of my worldview.

Also, my father (Worden McDonald) was investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and lost his job with Pacific Bell, the telephone company. During that time, none of his comrades came to our aid as a family.

Spirit: *HUAC was bad news, but then to not be supported... How did that affect you as a kid?*

McDonald: I remember talking to Toshi Seeger, Pete Seeger's wife, because I think that the left pretty much knows that Pete Seeger was investigated as a Communist by HUAC. We were having dinner with their daughters, and I said, "It was pretty rough on our family when my father was investigated. I remember it and it was terrible. I was a child and I was scared."

And Toshi said, "Well, we had a fine time. Our neighbors stuck right by us."

And I said, "Well, during those times, as a teenager, it was hard."

Toshi said, "We didn't have that problem in our family."

And Tinya, her daughter, said, "Well, I'm never going to talk about it!"

So these events impact the family, and I was well aware of that. War impacts the families of the veterans. It impacts the community. It impacts the children. And I found war and the dynamics of war extremely interesting. And the only way I can keep from going nuts about what I learned about veterans and war is to write music about it.

Spirit: *On the way to your house today, I was listening to your "Vietnam Experience" CD. A song about Agent Orange describes a soldier who feels paranoid and edgy, like there are enemies everywhere and they're going to kill him.*

McDonald: And they *were* going to kill him! That's right!

Spirit: *Even the bushes where Agent Orange was sprayed are going to kill him.*

McDonald: Not only was the enemy trying to kill him, but his government was trying to kill him! And not only tried to kill him, but did kill him! One of my best friends died of Agent Orange complications.

Spirit: *When did you become so involved in supporting the rights of veterans, and get involved with Swords to Plowshares, the VVAW, and Vietnam Veterans of America?*

McDonald: I went to an event at the Veterans Memorial Building in Berkeley in 1981 on the problems of Vietnam veterans, attended by movers and shakers in the movement. I met Jack McCloskey who was a corpsman with the Marines in Vietnam and also was involved in the healing from the Vietnam War.

I came to that event at the Veterans Building as a rock musician, a singer and entertainer supporting veterans, because I wanted to support them and their cause.

Spirit: *You have done a lot of concerts for the peace movement, but why was it just as important for you to also support Vietnam veterans?*

McDonald: I wanted to support them because I felt they were justified. Everything about them was important to know, and the public needed to know their stories. It was very important. It involved the nation and the world — everything.

But the important thing to me — and for your question — is that Jack McCloskey and I were standing on the steps of the Veterans Memorial Building, and as he was talking about a benefit coming up, he said, "Joe, would you like to play for this?" Then he said to me, "Joe, you're a veteran too."

And that blew my mind. It blew my mind! I internalized it at that moment, and I'm telling you, the next six months of my life were like an acid trip. Unbelievable.

And I realized that I was guilty, and that if I had been sent to Vietnam, I would have killed people. I'm not a pacifist and what I did was part of a machine. I was guilty of that.

Spirit: *Are you saying you were guilty of being part of the military machine?*

McDonald: Yes, I was part of the military machine. And I was a veteran. And I had feelings about being a veteran. I had feelings about how I was treated by the civilian population. I had feelings about my parents never talking to me about my military experience. I had feelings about the left wing using me as an entertainer to draw people to their cause. I had many, many, many internalized emotional feelings.

Spirit: *Is that because you now real-*

See **Interview with Country Joe** *page 11*

Interview with Country Joe McDonald

from page 10

ized that veteran's issues were not just about "them" but about "you" as well?

McDonald: Yes, and I came out of that experience whole — because I wasn't whole before that. There was a part of me that was blocked off. So then I realized that these people, veterans, were my comrades. They were my comrades!

And I'll tell you, I feel more comfortable around veterans than any other group. It's a profoundly enlightened group of people, with the knowledge that they have. Yeah, I feel comfortable. That's why I work with those guys.

Spirit: *Did you also want to seek better treatment for vets by society?*

McDonald: Well, yeah, in a way, but they were helping themselves anyway. So I just joined the group. I joined the bandwagon. We'd sit around and talk. We told jokes and had fun together. It was a fraternal organization and I watched it actually evolve and go through different changes.

Spirit: *You also toured and did benefits for veterans groups, didn't you?*

McDonald: I went around and I played for GI coffeehouses, and I played for Vietnam veterans' demonstrations. I played for the different organizations: the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and Vietnam Veterans of America. I helped do things at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., and for women who were Vietnam veterans.

Spirit: *What events at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington?*

McDonald: I played there two times as part of their ceremonies. I got to know Jan Scruggs, the guy who built the memorial. He became a friend of mine and we had some nice adventures together. I met Dr. Arthur Blank, the head of the V.A. outreach program. He just let me stay at his house when I was coming to Washington, D.C. I mean, I was embraced by these people.

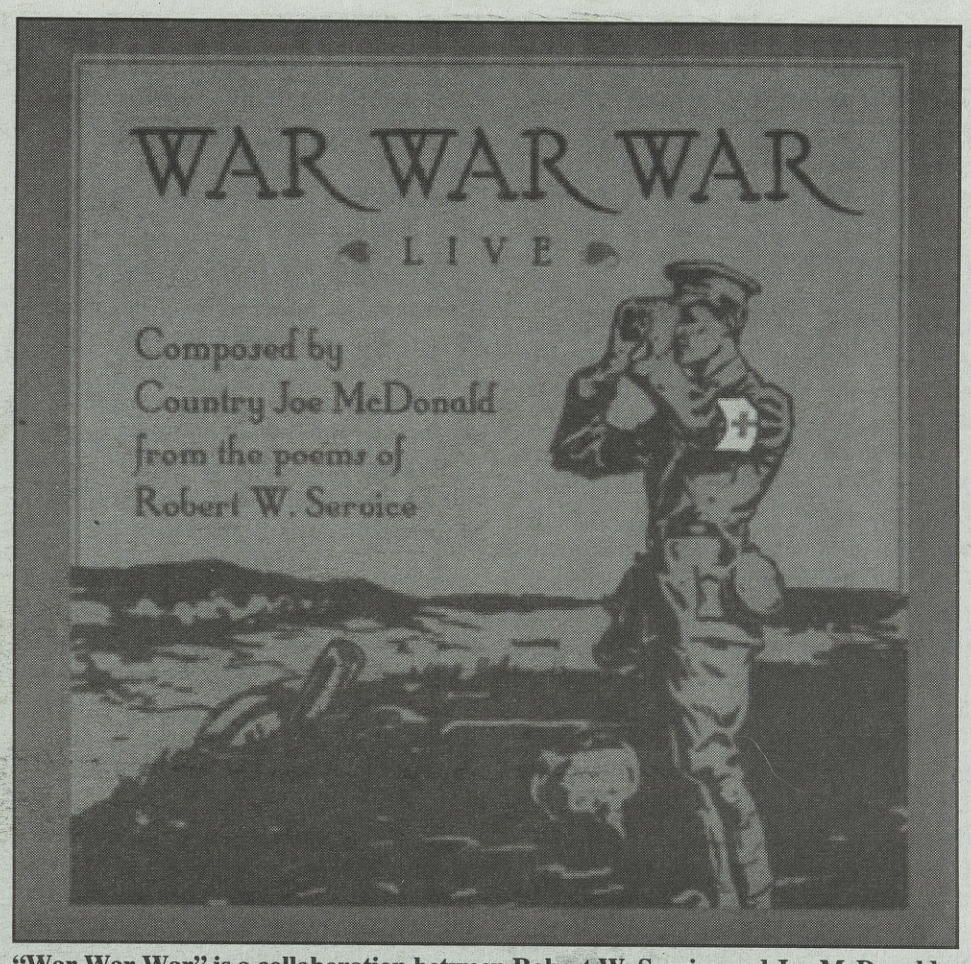
[*Editor:* Dr. Arthur Blank, the director of Vietnam Veteran Counseling Centers run by the V.A., was very involved in the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among Vietnam veterans.]

Spirit: *Why did veterans groups embrace the writer of such a rebellious song as Fixin' to Die Rag?*

McDonald: It became loved not only by military personnel who were against the war, but military personnel who were for the war. As a matter of fact, the song became something that was taught in Marine boot camp in San Diego. I know that for a fact. You see, I was appreciated for writing "Fixin' to Die Rag" by the left wing and by people who like music, the rock and roll community. It was something that I *did*. But with the veterans, it was something that I *am*.

So here's a little story about that. There's a guy, Phil Butler, and he was in the Hanoi Hilton, the atrocious prison camp in Vietnam that held pilots who were captured. John McCain was held in the Hanoi Hilton and Phil Butler was there for seven years. He became a member of Vietnam Veterans of America and I was playing in San Francisco at one of their events, just singing some songs there.

Phil Butler came up to me. I almost start crying just thinking about it, because he said, "You know, they would play American music in the compound in Hanoi Hilton to demoralize us." Hanoi Hannah would play music to demoralize Americans in the compound, the prisoners of war.



"War War War" is a collaboration between Robert W. Service and Joe McDonald.

Spirit: *Why would the music demoralize them? By making them miss home?*

McDonald: Yes, miss home — miss home and think about home. But Phil said, "When they would play 'Fixin' to Die Rag,' it would boost our morale and make us feel good." Then he said, "I never dreamed I would live to hear you sing it in person." We both started crying and hugged each other. It was like, "Oh, my God..."

I met a guy who told me his buddy died in his arms in Vietnam from his wounds and the last words from his lips were, "Whoopee, we're all gonna die."

This is beyond the Billboard chart of top 10 hits. It's something really special and it's very meaningful to me. And I was delighted to find that out, because I never would have found it if it hadn't been for Jack McCloskey telling me about being a veteran, and my getting to know all these guys and doing this stuff with them.

Spirit: *I saw in the news that you performed at the 20th anniversary of the Berkeley Vietnam War Memorial in November. How did you get involved?*

McDonald: Recently, I worked to help facilitate a Veteran's Day ceremony for the City of Berkeley at the Veterans Memorial Building. I've done quite a few programs like that. We hadn't had a Veteran's Day event in Berkeley for some years, and it occurred to me that I could help make this happen. I was the person who stirred the pot and got it going, along with former Mayor Shirley Dean and council people and Disabled American Veterans. It was a nice hometown Veteran's Day ceremony. I sang "Fixin' to Die Rag."

Spirit: *You've done benefits for veterans groups all over the country.*

McDonald: Yeah, I've done quite a few events for veterans — left-wing, right-wing, middle-wing, Navy, Army, women and men.

Spirit: *You've also written far more songs about war than most people realize. Every song on "Vietnam Experience" speaks out against the horrors of war and gives voice to the soldiers in the field. What led you to make that album?*

McDonald: I realized at some point I could make a whole album of these songs. I had done thematic albums like *Thinking of Woody Guthrie* and *War War War*, but it occurred to me I could do the *Vietnam Experience* album.

The last song of that album was "Welcome Home." A Navy vet friend of mine, Alan Bacall, was working on a documentary film of a large tickertape parade to welcome home Vietnam veterans. The film was called "Welcome Home," and he asked me to write the title song.

I said I'd try, and then I realized that in order to write that song, I had to check my attitude and put it aside.

Spirit: *What attitude did you have to set aside?*

McDonald: My attitude of: "Fuck those people, they did this to me. They're wrong, and *these* are the right people. *These* are the good guys and *these* are the bad guys."

And that's how I could write, "Some refused to go and some went away to fight. Everyone wants to know who was wrong and who was right. But the war is over and we may never agree. Its time to put the deaths to rest and get together and say, Welcome home!"

So I had to put my attitude on hold and write an uplifting song. A friend of mine who is a pro-war, Vietnam War nurse said that "Welcome Home" was her favorite song. She loved that song because there's no finger-pointing. It's a morale-boosting welcome home song for people that weren't welcomed home.

It was a pleasure to be a part of that. I had to internalize that and I had to *feel* it. I had to feel that I was resigning from this argument: Is war right? Is war wrong?

Just as a musician and a Navy veteran, I don't know who is responsible for war. It's occurred to me many, many times to wonder why doesn't the collective consciousness of the people of America say, "No to war. We're going to dismantle this machine." I remember talking to my mother about this. She's Jewish and she hated the Vietnam War. She said the Vietnam veterans were baby killers, you know.

When I traveled through Germany, I asked my audiences in Germany at every gig, "Anybody here have family members in the military?" Not a person raised their hand. "Anybody have grandparents who were in the military?" Not a single person raised their hand. Nobody. Then I realized that these Nazis were soldiers and their families were dealing with the stigmatization — like Vietnam veterans are doing. Who is to blame for that?

Spirit: *If the soldiers are not to blame for war, who is to blame?*

McDonald: Who is to blame? Well, like I said in "Fixin' to Die Rag," the political leaders and the millionaires and the military leaders and the governments that make the world go round. The Pol Pots, the Lyndon Johnsons.

Spirit: *And, in the case of Germany, the Hitlers.*

McDonald: The Hitlers. And the people who supported Hitler. Without his machine, he would have just been a nut case on the street corner.

Spirit: *In "Vietnam Veteran Still Alive," you asked the president to welcome home those who served in Vietnam. What do you think the government should have done to welcome veterans home?*

McDonald: Well, I'm not a philosopher. I'm just a musician. I mean, I'm just me. But I'd like to make a little comparison here. What if you're working for the U.S. Post Office? That's a government job, right? And what if something happens at work and both your legs are blown off? What compensation should you get from the post office?

But what if you're in war, working for the government, and your legs are blown off? What compensation should you get from the government? I think that everybody sort of agrees that the post office worker should get more than the person in the military. But I don't know if that is right. My job is just to throw stuff out there for you to think about.

With my union upbringing and my leftist upbringing, let's say you're working in the Teamsters union and a Caterpillar tractor runs over your legs. What compensation should you get from that? And would the union defend you?

But let's say that you're in the military and you have that same job — they have people who drive Caterpillar tractors — and your legs get run over by the tractor. What kind of compensation should you get from that? And who is going to speak out in your defense? Who? The Joint Chiefs of Staff? Where is your union? A military tribunal? What the fuck. You're going to go to the VA and get in line. Get in line, man. The unfairness of it is obvious.

Spirit: *Many veterans had to fight for basic medical care when they returned home. I did an article on the hospice movement and interviewed a Vietnam veteran who survived the war, only to die of Hodgkin's disease from Agent Orange.*

McDonald: The Agent Orange story is so sad and so tragic. The Agent Orange problems in Vietnam from this defoliant are generational, and from an ecological point of view, many planetary problems are caused by dioxin. Back then, dioxin wasn't recognized as being harmful, and it's been a struggle. But it just kills you and it causes birth defects in the second generation. It's a horrible, terrible thing. Some of this stuff is so hard to look at.

[*Editor:* Agent Orange is made up of two herbicides, 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T. The 2,4,5-T was contaminated with dioxin, described as "perhaps the most toxic molecule ever synthesized by man" and a cause of cancer, Hodgkin's lymphoma and leukemia, even in the children of those exposed to Agent Orange.]

Spirit: *You recorded two songs about Agent Orange, and also took part in a film documentary about Agent Orange.*

McDonald: Yeah, two documentaries. The song, "Vietnam Experience" was turned into a music video by Green Mountain Post Films, which came out of an underground news service in New England. I think it is really powerful.

[*Editor:* The *San Francisco Chronicle* called *Vietnam Experience* "a gripping mix of wartime and post-war film footage without commentary, except for antiwar songs by Country Joe McDonald that is "more harrowing and more eloquent than all the Hollywood movies on the subject."]

Spirit: *Did the second film focus specifically on the horror of Agent Orange?*

McDonald: Yes, Green Mountain Post Films made an Agent Orange film called "The Secret Agent." It was rather shock-

See **Interview with Country Joe** *page 12*

Interview with Country Joe McDonald

from page 11

ing. I wrote the music for the film. As part of the film's score, I recorded Muriel Hogan's song, "Agent Orange Song." She's a Vietnam Veterans Against the War person, and she wrote the song, and I popularized it, and put it on the album because I realized it was a really powerful statement and a really good song.

Spirit: *It's a great song. Didn't you write a second song about Agent Orange on the* Vietnam Experience *record?*

McDonald: Yes, the song is called "Secret Agent" because Agent Orange is the secret agent and the film is called *Secret Agent*. I got the element of paranoia in this song because you think, "Something is trying to kill me. I'm being killed."

Spirit: *Yes, in the song a soldier survives the war but when he comes home, he realizes he was killed in Vietnam by Agent Orange and he didn't even know.*

McDonald: That's right. That's right. In the documentary, there are endless shots of planes spraying the jungle with this defoliant. There are so many planes spraying Agent Orange for so many miles and miles and miles and miles. And then there are shots of GIs with these 50-gallon containers full of this dioxin which is the deadliest poison ever created, just spraying it as if you're watering your lawn.

You just look at the film and you think, "Oh my God, I just didn't realize the magnitude of it." I've actually heard that aircraft carriers that were docked off the coast of Vietnam, sometimes would use empty barrels from Agent Orange and Agent White, and they would fill those up with water to take to the ship.

Spirit: *For the sailors' drinking water?*

McDonald: Drinking water and showering water. It's horrible! It's horrible stuff! That's why we sometimes try to be a little sarcastic and smart-asses about it — to keep from crying.

Spirit: *At an event on Vietnam veterans, you heard Lynda Van Devanter, who had been a combat nurse in Vietnam, speak out about women in the military. What did you learn from her and how did that lead to your fascination with Florence Nightingale's work in combat nursing?*

McDonald: I was attending a seminar in Berkeley about the problems of Vietnam veterans in 1981, and Lynda Van Devanter was the only woman speaking. She accused the people in the audience — veteran activists and Vietnam Veterans Against the War people — of ignoring the role of women in the military.

I took it to heart. I thought, "Oh my God, I did ignore it." I sang, "Come on all you big strong *men*, Uncle Sam needs your help again." I didn't acknowledge women, although I'd been in the military myself, and I knew women were in the military. I promised Lynda that I would write a song about her.

But after I promised that I'd write a song about her and wartime nursing, I realized that I didn't know anything about it. I had a collection of encyclopedias at home, and I looked up nursing and the article mentioned Florence Nightingale. It said that she was an upper-class English woman who went off to do nursing in the 1850s in the Crimean War, and for the first time brought women in as nurses, and she suffered a nervous disorder for the rest of her life after her experiences in the war.

I had just come back from a seminar where we talked about the problems of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and I wondered if she had PTSD. So I went to Holmes Books in Oakland and I found two books: Cecil Woodham-Smith's definitive biography, titled *Florence Nightingale,* and Sir Edward Cook's two-volume biography, *The Life of Florence Nightingale*.

I read them, and it was so fascinating. I knew nothing about the Victorian era. And the Crimean War, which was very similar to the Vietnam War, was a debacle. Everything went wrong in that war.

I learned the story of Florence Nightingale's struggle as a woman against a patriarchy that chose to ignore her, and the way she was treated; and her companionship that she found with the Sisters of Mercy, the Catholic sisters she worked with. It was just so fascinating and incredible, and I started collecting stuff about her life, and about nursing, and studying it.

I amassed quite a big archive about her, and I just recently donated it to the UCSF Nursing School. It occurred to me that I should put together a tribute to Florence Nightingale like I did with the Woody Guthrie tribute.

When I was studying about Florence Nightingale, I learned that her family was part of the upper class in England. She was presented to Queen Victoria, and they were like the Kennedy family.

She went to the Crimea and lived through this trauma, and when she came back from the war, she refused to be acknowledged in any way for her service. She lived reclusively. I studied the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and one is isolation.

Spirit: *You described Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in your song, "The Girl Next Door (Combat Nurse)." It's a beautiful statement about the bravery and sacrifices of combat nurses in Vietnam. Was Lynda Van Devanter the inspiration?*

McDonald: Well, Lynda challenged me to recognize women in the Vietnam War, and I promised her I would write a song about it. She was the first woman to write about her nursing experiences in the war, and the first woman to come out as a nurse and speak out publicly. Lynda said that she was the girl next door, so the phrase came from her, and I latched onto that for the title of my song.

And then I was a friend of Rose Sandecki, who was doing Vietnam outreach for women during the beginning of the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I interviewed her and I described how Florence Nightingale came home and refused to talk to her family, or the press, or anybody, and just snuck home in private. And Rose said that's exactly the same way she came home. She came home in secret to her family when she came home from the Vietnam War.

[*Editor:* Rose Sandecki served as an Army Nurse Captain in Vietnam. Her harrowing experiences while nursing wounded and dying soldiers led her to become a counselor for soldiers suffering from PTSD. Sandecki was appointed team leader in 1981 of a Veterans Administration center dealing with PTSD.]

Spirit: *So you saw similar patterns in the experiences of combat nurses like Lynda Van Devanter and Rose Sandecki in Vietnam and Florence Nightingale 100 years earlier in the Crimean War?*

McDonald: I thought, this is a commonality here, a common experience that hadn't been publicized or known about —people coming home from the war and being isolated, not being able to talk to people, not being able to relate to a friend. It was not being publicized in any way at that time, with nobody knowing about it.

When Florence Nightingale came home from the Crimean War, she could not relate to her friends any longer. She had no peer group. And these women coming home from the Vietnam War, they had no peer group. They started to form their own peer groups. And they never were the same after their wartime experiences. They were shoved into a horrific, unbelievable experience, and that's what I wrote about in the song.

Spirit: *You captured that in the song. When the combat nurse comes home, her friends can't understand why she isn't fun anymore. You sang: "But a vision of the wounded screams inside her brain, and the girl next door will never be the same."*

McDonald: Yes. The girl next door will **NEVER** be the same! Never! Never! Never! She'll never be the same!

Spirit: *People assume that therapy or the passage of time or new experiences can eventually heal most wounds. Why do you say she'll never be the same?*

McDonald: Because once you have these experiences in war, you're never going to be the same. You know, there is a myth that you can recover from these experiences. I like to focus on the war experiences because it's a government-sponsored experience. It's a taxpayer-sponsored experience. Collectively, as a nation, we are responsible for these experiences.

When I was dealing with families who had lost a loved one, I found that the parents somehow got some kind of closure, but the siblings never got closure. They were bitter from the moment when I encountered them. When I set up that Berkeley memorial, they were still bitter about it.

Spirit: *Why do you think they had that long-lasting sadness and anger? Why couldn't they find closure?*

McDonald: I don't know what happens when you lose a sibling. What I'm saying about these experiences is that you think — in the fantasy that you have of your life — that you'll go and have an experience and then come back home. You'll go off to college and you'll come back home, and you'll just put it in the plethora of experiences that you have.

But these experiences in war change the trajectory of your life. You come back home, and you used to be fun, and now you're no fun anymore.

Spirit: *Because you've seen too much and been blasted with traumatic experiences that don't fit into civilian life?*

McDonald: Yes, plus the problem of the loathing that they experience. Now, thanks to Vietnam veterans collectively, we have peer-group counseling, which is the only thing that enables you to cope with your experience. But you never get over your experience. Never. Never.

Spirit: *Your song says that the nurse is everybody's savior but her own. Then it asks, "Who will save her now?"*

McDonald: Yes, who will save her now?

Spirit: *Well, who will save her?*

McDonald: That's the question. I don't know. I'm sort of the Greek chorus. I just ask these questions, and give a voice to people who don't have a voice. That's one of the things I do in that song.

Spirit: *Did you feel that Van Devanter and Florence Nightingale had experienced so much death and destruction, that they suffered the same kind of post-traumatic stress as a combat soldier?*

McDonald: Absolutely! Absolutely! Or the stress of a rape victim. Or any inexplicable, sudden trauma. You don't get over being raped.

Spirit: *Did Van Devanter write a book about her experiences in Vietnam?*

McDonald: Yeah, *Home Before Morning*. It's her autobiography. Great book. The first woman to write about this — and there haven't been a lot. "China Beach," the TV show, was based on her book and her experiences in Vietnam.

[*Editor: Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam,* by Lynda Van Devanter, was the basis for the award-winning TV series, "China Beach," set in a hospital in the Vietnam War.]

Spirit: *Lynda helped so many people with PTSD and Agent Orange ailments, but she herself died in 2002 at the age of 55 due to her exposure to Agent Orange. How were you affected by her death?*

McDonald: Lynda and I participated in a few veterans things together and I liked her very much. She was the person that sent me on my journey to discover and explore the life of Florence Nightingale. Just her presence as a visible female soldier and Vietnam veteran opened doors to other women and introduced the public to the reality of women in the military. Even today, women are for the most part invisible.

Over the years, I was a witness to her health problems getting worse and worse. Like so many others who died of war-related wounds, her death was tragic. Had she lived, she would have been such a strong witness to the realities of war from the female perspective.

I don't think anyone picked up where she left off. That is, of course, sad. We so need to de-romanticize war in order to stop it, and she was working towards that end. For me personally, I felt I lost a friend and comrade and felt so sorry for her daughter and husband.

Her book *Home Before Morning* about her life and the Vietnam War, and the collection of poems she did with Joan Furey, *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace,* are must-reads for anyone who thinks that they know about war.

Even after her death, she can continue to open your mind about military women and war, like she did for me. I really miss her very much. Vietnam veterans continue to die every day from war-related wounds and very little is done about it. So sad.

Spirit: *Everything you have learned from Lynda Van Devanter and Florence Nightingale must have even more impact considering how many members of your immediate family are nurses.*

McDonald: My wife Kathy is a labor and delivery nurse and midwife. My niece is a nurse in San Francisco. My daughter just became a nurse. My brother retired as a nurse practitioner from Kaiser after 36 years. And, of course, my mother was named Florence. Another coincidence in my life.

Spirit: *Why did you become so captivated by Nightingale that you made a pilgrimage to England to visit her home and amassed a huge archive about her life?*

McDonald: I identified with her a lot. I identified with her being misunderstood by her family, and being isolated, and the way she was following a call.

Her family had two homes. They had a country home and their main home. In their main home, they had 70 gardeners. Florence had her own French maid her whole life. She was part of the upper class. Her family was part of the 20,000 families that owned England at that time.

Spirit: *So she could have lived in luxury her entire life, and she was never expected to work — yet she worked herself to exhaustion in a horrifying war zone.*

McDonald: When she went off to study nursing in Germany at the age of 33, it was the first time in her life that she had ever dressed herself, and done her own hair. And she went from that into the hell of the Crimean War with 2,000 deaths in her first year, and dysentery, bleeding, vomiting, moaning and groaning. Then she went on after that to sanitize the country of India.

Her story is incredible. And the other

See **Interview with Country Joe** *page 13*

Interview with Country Joe McDonald

from page 12

thing that fascinated me is how ignored she is. Almost nobody idolizes Florence Nightingale today — except me.

Spirit: *She was one of the most compassionate leaders the world has known, and the founder of nursing. Her achievements are on the same level as Gandhi or Martin Luther King, yet she's not honored as they are.*

McDonald: Right! There hasn't even been a realistic movie made about her. She's almost forgotten now, even though her name is still known. But she was, and is, misunderstood.

Spirit: *In your Tribute to Florence Nightingale, you described her nursing 2,000 dying soldiers in the Crimean War. She called them "living skeletons, devoured by vermin." She says these amazing words: "I stand at the altar of the murdered men and while I live I fight their cause."*

McDonald: Isn't that beautiful? Isn't that gorgeous?

Spirit: *It's really electrifying. And you recite those words with so much urgency. Why did you want to make those words come alive for a modern audience?*

McDonald: Oh, I just love it! Because in the first part of what you just read, she gives you her credentials. She tells you that she personally knows what she is talking about. She had this personal experience of war that caused a change in her life and caused her to be transformed.

She said, "I stand at the altar of the *murdered* men." I love the word "murdered." **MURDERED**. These men were murdered. They didn't serve their country. They were murdered. They were murdered not by the enemy — they were murdered by war. They were murdered by their government. They were murdered.

And as long as I live, she said, I'll champion their cause, because they don't have a voice of their own. And she did it. She did it! For the rest of her life, she did it!

Spirit: *Another highly moving moment in your tribute is when she said, "I will never forget." You emphasized the importance of those words.*

McDonald: Yeah, that's the thing that really got me. And that's the thing that got me with the other Vietnam War nurses. They also found out: "I can never forget."

Those are Florence Nightingale's own words: "I can **NEVER** forget!" And she wrote it on pieces of paper for the rest of her life. "I can never forget." She took extensive notes, and wrote constantly, just volumes and volumes of stuff. And she was always writing: "I can never forget."

Spirit: *What did it mean to her to write those words over and over and over?*

McDonald: It means that she wants to forget it, but she can never forget it. And that drove her on, that she could never forget the experience of war.

Spirit: *On one hand, it was a sacred trust for Nightingale to never forget the soldiers who had died. But on the other, it's like she would always be haunted and traumatized by their deaths.*

McDonald: She *was* haunted! She was haunted! Like everybody is haunted when they're the trauma victims of war. And everybody has his or her own capacity.

She attended to 2000 deaths and she could never forget that. But we don't know what our own capacity is. We like to think, "Well, I could be a firefighter. I could be a soldier. I could be an emergency medical technician. I could be a doctor. I could help somebody through cancer." But we don't know. We don't know what our capacity is.

Florence Nightingale Commemorative Statue, London Road, Derby.

It could be the smallest thing or the largest thing. It can be one death or two deaths or one frightening thing. But there are things that happen in your life that cause you to say: "I can never forget."

Spirit: *You said that after the Crimean War, she carried that nervous condition with her until she died at the age of 90.*

McDonald: There are a lot of theories about it. One is that she suffered from brucellosis (or Crimean fever), and maybe she did. Maybe she had lead poisoning or mercury poisoning. But part of the mix, the gestalt that made up Florence Nightingale, was her war experiences.

The other fascinating thing about Florence Nightingale was that in an age when women did not have careers, she chose to have a career. She chose to never get married. She decided she didn't want to do that. She was going to have a career.

Spirit: *In many ways, she was a woman who opened doors.*

McDonald: That's right. She walked that road. She broke those doors down. She is very interesting.

Spirit: *The thread that runs through nearly everything you've said in this interview is the terrible damage caused by war — combat nurses who can never forget, veterans who go on suffering long after the war is over, families who were blown apart just as much as their soldier sons were blown apart. What does all this have to say to governmental leaders who wage wars that will cause permanent damage and suffering to countless people?*

McDonald: I love Kurt Vonnegut, and he wrote a book called *The Sirens of Titan*. It's a really great book. I've read it so many times. He talks about the Tralfamadorians who would think in the form of a cloud above their planet. A cloud would form above their planet and all their consciousnesses would merge into one and they would make decisions.

[Editor: The Tralfamadorians also appear in *Slaughterhouse-Five* where Vonnegut writes: "All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them."]

We don't have such a thing. So in making decisions about war, we have governmental bodies. We have the rule of law. We have customs and ethnicities and grudges that go back for generations that prevent us from merging our consciousness together. We do have a collective consciousness of being a planet now, because we've seen pictures taken from outer space that show we are a planet, and we are on a sphere, and we are a species on this planet of sapient beings.

But we haven't developed the ability to communicate collectively. So without that, we're at a loss. We're at a loss and we don't know what to do. How do we decide these great questions of war and peace? What can we do? I don't know.

In my own consciousness, there are the civilians, and then there are the veterans; there are the anti-war people and the pro-war people. What we need is a dialogue, but how do we have a dialogue? How do we have a collective dialogue with seven billion people? Seven billion people! But we need to have a dialogue. Don't we need a dialogue to decide these things?

Spirit: *Albert Einstein looked to international law and the abolition of war crimes and the strengthening of the United Nations. He called for every individual to refuse to participate in war, and called for governments to abolish weapons of mass destruction.*

McDonald: But that's only a piece of it. For some reason, I've been obsessed over the past couple years with how you use language to describe the totality of what surrounds us on this planet. I don't mean the horizons. I don't mean the northern hemisphere or the southern hemisphere, but the totality of everything that surrounds us. What language do we have for that? We don't have a language. But we need to be able to conceive of and describe and communicate everything that exists. All religions, all thoughts, all points of view.

We need to get together and make a decision: Are we going to continue doing this destructive dance that we do? Maybe we'll decide yes. Maybe we'll decide no. But how do we even begin?

There was once this concept that the United Nations would do that. But we used to play this game when you were a kid when you had to form a circle and you would whisper something in someone's ear, and they'd whisper in another person's ear and it goes around the circle and by the time it gets around, it's a different message. Sometimes with the translations that take place at the United Nations, you wonder what the hell is going on.

During the Crimean War there was the Charge of the Light Brigade where Lucan wrote a little message to this other guy Cardigan and they misinterpreted it and they charged into heavy artillery and many were killed. Miscommunication. None of us are dealing with a full deck. I'm looking for the full deck. [laughs] Where is the full deck? Anybody got a full deck?

Spirit; *Empathy is one crucial part of understanding others. On the institutional level, there is international law that applies to all nations. On the person-to-person level, there is empathy where you really begin to understand others. Like when an anti-war activist begins to understand a little about what a veteran has gone through. And that changes both of them.*

McDonald: Yeah! That was the fascination with me for the veterans and their families and the women in the military and the combat nurses. It's INCLUSIVE, not exclusive.

Spirit: And when you were talking about that common language, I was thinking of John Lennon's first line in "I Am The Walrus." "I am he as you are he and you are me and we are all together."

McDonald: Right! Yeah. Yeah.

Spirit: *So I just solved it. You just need to listen to the Beatles more often. [both laugh] Speaking of songs, "Lady with the Lamp" is such a beautiful song about Florence Nightingale. You describe how she nurses soldiers dying thousands of miles from home. "She will hold his hand, stay with him to the end. You know she understands, she's the soldier's friend."*

McDonald: Yes, that's what they called her — they called her the soldier's friend. The soldiers hadn't had a friend before. As a matter of fact, Florence Nightingale is the person who started charting. In other words, when she had a patient, she wrote their names down and what happened to them. Because before Florence Nightingale, when the war was over and the ships came back, the families stood on the dock and waited to see if their loved ones came off the ship.

Spirit: *That was the only way they knew the fate of their loved ones?*

McDonald: See, that's one of the terrible things about war. You can become missing in action. She started that whole thing of keeping records, which is a grisly task.

Spirit: *Before that, people would often just disappear into death, and their families would always wonder?*

McDonald: Yeah, if you were just a working-class grunt in the army, nobody knew what happened to you. Nobody ever knew. If you were upper class, one of the officers, it was different. But the lower classes are the nameless ones.

So back then, if you wanted to find out if your friend died in the war, your loved one, nobody's keeping their records. But Florence Nightingale kept records, and that's one reason they called her "the sol-

See **Interview with Country Joe** *page 14*

Interview with Country Joe McDonald

from page 13

dier's friend." Because nobody was the soldier's friend before then.

Spirit: *In your song, a dying soldier asks Nightingale to write to his mother and send a keepsake home "to those I'll never see again."*

McDonald: Right, she literally did that — the first time it had ever been done.

Spirit: *Even while nursing hundreds of dying soldiers, she'd write to their families and send a keepsake or photo?*

McDonald: That's right — and at her own expense. She personally did that.

Spirit: *Can you describe your pilgrimage to Florence Nightingale's home in England? And what were your feelings when you visited her gravesite?*

McDonald: Oh wow, it was like a fantasy. It was like a dream of mine because I had been studying her life for years, actually, and I never dreamed that I would be able to go to her burial site.

It just so happened that I made a connection with an ex-nurse and her husband who had a Nightingale Society. They go over there every year and do this commemorative Florence Nightingale thing on her birthday. I happened to be going to England at the same time for some gigs, and they took me over there to that little parish church where she's buried.

Oh my God, it was fantastic. It was a missing piece in my journey through Florence Nightingale's life because I had been to some other places, and that was the one place that I hadn't been. And through them, I got to attend the commemorative ceremony that happens there every year in Westminster Abbey, too. So it was amazing, really. It was just incredible.

Spirit: *You had already done a lot of research into her life. How did the trip change your picture of her life and work?*

McDonald: It just really brought her life down to earth, rather than it being a fantasy in a book. I had been just looking at pictures for a number of years. I got to actually see her gravesite. I got to go into that church. I got to have a feel for what her life was actually like. We went to the main building, the main mansion, that she lived in, which is now a boy's school. It was open on that day to the public.

I got to walk on the grounds that I had only seen pictures of. I got to stand under the tree where she supposedly got her call from God. All these things just had been pretty abstract to me, but I was fascinated with them, and then I got to physically be right there. It was incredible. It was also incredible that it all fell together like that on that trip. It was just in a few days that all of that stuff happened to me. And I took some pictures of it and got to put it up on my website of her life. It was amazing. You know, I'm a rabid fan of hers.

Spirit: *It's interesting that her life story has given you so much inspiration. She has taught you a lot about the effects of war on soldiers forced into battle.*

McDonald: I don't exactly know why I find Florence Nightingale so interesting. She recognized the dehumanizing effects of war on the warriors. She talks of the effect that war has on the soldiers, making them drink and be sadistic.

She came to tend to their physical wounds and, in that, she was different from the way the military treated them. She was caring and kind. The old soldiers accused her of "spoiling the brutes." She tended to their last wishes and desires before death. No one had done that before. Then she noted the psychological and emotional effect war had on their personalities and decided to do something about it.

On her own dime, she built little cafes and got people to give lessons to the soldiers and provided writing materials for them to write home. And on her own, she developed a system so that they could send money home to their families. In that sense, she was the inventor of the USO with reading rooms, educational courses and savings plans.

She did this over 150 years ago. And today we live in a world of warrior worship. We don't hate and disrespect soldiers any more, but we place them on a pedestal that dehumanizes them, I think. So I just think it is important to examine war from every angle possible.

And I do believe that war is caused by civilians, not soldiers. So anything we can do to see war from the point of view of soldiers is important. Because after all, they do not exist alone like robots or projections of our minds. They are our family members and when they feel something, we feel it. When they dysfunction, we dysfunction.

The cost is huge, not only in physical terms, but in emotional and spiritual terms. I think that if we open up to see it, we have no choice but to stop doing it or die. Thanks for getting me to think about all this. It is a challenge to put into words. I, of course, mostly put things into song.

COUNTRY JOE AND THE FISH

Spirit: *Country Joe and the Fish were deeply involved in the counterculture of the Bay Area. That period is now seen in almost mythic terms as a utopian and revolutionary time. What was it like for you to be part of the so-called Aquarian Age?*

McDonald: It was important for me to be part of the Aquarian Age. Up until then in my life, I had never felt a real part of something like the Aquarian Age.

We were collectively *something*. I don't know how to describe it, except that it was magical. It was like all at the same time, amazing stuff happened in Paris, stuff happened in London, stuff happened in San Francisco and BOOM!

Everybody agreed on the same premise: peace and love. It was a moment of peace and love. And it really happened. I don't know how or why it happened. But it was a wonderful thing to happen.

It was so great to be called a hippie! I wanted to be a hippie my whole life. And there I was — a hippie! And I'm still a hippie. Peace and love.

Spirit: *In The Year of the Young Rebels, Stephen Spender described the same spirit of freedom in Mexico, Paris, London, Czechoslovakia and the U.S. The spirit of peace and love was happening all over the world in 1968.*

McDonald: Yeah! A friend of mine, Fito de la Parra, who plays drums with Canned Heat, grew up in Mexico. He made a documentary of the hippie peace-and-love thing in Mexico and what happened in Mexico City with these little coffeehouses. These people started rock bands and then they had their little Woodstock thing out in the country where thousands of people came. I've seen footage of it. And right after that, the government shut down every single radio station and club, and it took 20 years for rock and roll in Mexico to come back.

Spirit: *The government saw the music as a threat.*

McDonald: I don't know why, but rock and roll is a threat to the leaders. You know, it's illegal to have a rock band in Iran. You can't. You'll get arrested. We're lucky to be in America. If I wasn't in America, I would have been in prison or killed like Joe Hill (the IWW union activist and songwriter).

Spirit: *There is a kind of lazy revisionism that mocks the 1960s counterculture. But there was a great outpouring of freedom and imagination and rebellion — an uprising of peace and love. A whole generation felt that.*

McDonald: I really agree with all of the stuff that you're saying. And it was accessible to everyone. It was completely democratic. Total, pure democracy. We called them hippies. Anybody could become a hippie just by being a hippie.

I could be something that I'd wanted to be my whole life. I felt free. I felt part of it all. I felt safe. I was part of something and I felt useful. I felt like I had found a niche, something that I could do. I had a talent — I could make music. I could be a part of it all. And it was *fun*. It was a lot of *fun*.

The other thing about being a hippie that was really great was that soon after it began in 1967, everyone in the mainstream began to hate hippies. And that made it even more exciting.

Spirit: *Why did you feel it was a good thing to be hated by the mainstream?*

McDonald: Because we were the antiheroes. If they hated us — all these squares and fascists and Nazis and the mainstream people that had let us all down — if they hated us just because we were having fun, then it *had* to be great.

We could be pretend heroes, and soon, Marvel Comics began coming out with all these superheroes — the birth of Spiderman, X-Men and all that stuff.

Spirit: *Long-haired and mystic heroes like Dr. Strange, Thor, Silver Surfer.*

McDonald: Yeah, Dr. Strange was great! He had an astral projection of his spirit. I mean, wow, how cool was that? And with LSD you could imagine having astral projection yourself. And it was fun. That was the missing element with all the other stuff in my life. It was pure, unadulterated fun.

Spirit: *You had good timing in moving to Berkeley in 1965 right when the whole counterculture was about to take off.*

McDonald: Being a hippie was something that I had dreamed of, because it was something I could turn myself into. I had tried a lot of things before which were not very satisfying. And being a hippie was easy to do, because you could just wear cheap clothes from the second-hand shops, or anything that you wanted.

Also, it had that peace and love vibe to it, which was free from politics, and from dogmatism and from what I considered theoretical bullshit. I hadn't found that freedom before in all the traditional things I had explored from the military and high school and the left-wing politics from my family.

Spirit: *What was it like for Country Joe and the Fish to play at the Fillmore Auditorium and the Avalon Ballroom in the glory days of psychedelic music?*

McDonald: We played a lot at the Fillmore and the Avalon starting in 1967. People would do these crazy psychedelic dances. There would usually be three bands playing two sets each. So it was six sets of music during the night. And there was just one dressing room, so all the guitar cases and everything would be crammed in there. Everybody was just mingling together. There was no hierarchy of the top-billed group and the bottom of the bill, or "We're more famous than you."

I used to stand in front, next to the stage, right at Jerry Garcia's feet, watching his hands really closely because he did a really neat thing when he played the guitar that I wanted to figure out. And eventually I did figure it out. It was the way he bent the guitar strings.

Spirit: *Did the new music and the new counterculture make you feel like you were now part of a community?*

McDonald: We *were* part of a community. We were just across the Bay in Berkeley, and we did find our way into San Francisco, just because the phone rang. Things happened really fast in 1966, '67 and '68 — unbelievably fast. So we became part of that community, and that was really nice because I think pretty much everybody who was a part of that community didn't feel like they were a part of the American society.

We had been rejected in one way or another by that society, and we found this new identity as a hippie, and a lifestyle that was disdained by the establishment. And we created a music that was disdained by the establishment.

Everybody brought their own unique kind of music and then they began struggling with the definition of it. Was it West Coast rock? Was it psychedelic music? What the heck was it? [laughs]

The music industry could not figure out what the hell it was. Then very quickly, they figured out that they had found a gold mine and they began signing up bands, and making albums and putting it out there. The industry wanted to make money off the music. But we never thought about money — never. Country Joe and the Fish never thought about money. The Grateful Dead probably never thought about money.

Spirit: *Still, the San Francisco sound became huge and vastly influential, seemingly overnight.*

McDonald: Oh, it exploded nationally and internationally, and it all happened on the West Coast. And most of it happened here in the San Francisco Bay Area. It was magic. It was really magic.

Spirit: *Why did it feel like magic?*

McDonald: Because you couldn't explain why it happened. I think the Bay Area has something that allows things to happen. The Gold Rush, beatniks, the longshoremen's union. Every now and then, something explodes in the Bay Area and then people begin coming to the Bay Area. The Steve Miller Band came to the Bay Area and the Bay Area had it all. It was fun and magic and unpretentious.

Spirit: *The Monterey International Pop Festival in 1967 was a peak moment for the counterculture. Country Joe and the Fish are shown playing in D.A. Pennebaker's film, Monterey Pop. What was it like to play at Monterey?*

McDonald: Well, I played at Monterey with the Fish as part of the group, but I also had my own separate experience. I wandered around and I watched a lot of the concert. I took Owsley's new invention called STP. He was passing it out and I took a tab and a half of that and I felt like I was walking through a Monet painting the whole entire time. I remember being on the beach yelling to porpoises and having them look back at me.

I watched pretty much the whole show and I had a good time. You know, I enjoyed being part of the Aquarian Age and those incredible moments of musical history when just all that stuff was happening — like the best potluck you've ever attended in your life. It was unbelievable.

I was right there in the front row when Jimi Hendrix played and set his guitar on fire with some lighter fluid. I'd never seen a person do that. I also saw The Who play and they were really great, but the amazing thing was that they smashed their instruments. I couldn't understand that because we had saved up to buy our instruments. I was a poor kid when I was growing up so I couldn't understand why anybody would smash their instruments.

Otis Redding was incredible. Oh my God, he was so good! Those are the highlights that I remember and, of course, Janis Joplin.

Spirit: *I thought Janis doing "Ball and Chain" at Monterey was amazing.*

McDonald: Yeah, I thought she was good. She obviously mesmerized the

See **Interview with Country Joe** *page 15*

Interview with Country Joe McDonald

from page 14

audience and they were just all gaga over her. It was a great show.

We had been boyfriend-girlfriend for two or three months in the Haight-Ashbury before Monterey. We were breaking up at the time of Monterey. Before Monterey happened, I was there when Chet Helms introduced her at the Avalon Ballroom in San Francisco when she first hooked up with Big Brother and the Holding Company. I loved her with Big Brother and the Holding Company. I thought that was a great rock and roll band.

Spirit: *I did too. Some critics started putting them down as excessive, and they were underrated, but I thought Big Brother was a great band and worked well with Janis. You wrote a moving song called "Janis." How did that song come about?*

McDonald: When I broke up with Janis, she said, "Would you write a song for me before you get too far away from me?" So I was up in Vancouver and I played a little thing on my guitar and I quickly wrote the lyrics and the song, "Janis." I liked the song.

Spirit: *It's a really pretty song. You wrote, "Into my life on waves of electrical sound and flashing light she came."*

McDonald: Yeah, people really liked the song. And I do too. I think it's really nice.

Spirit: *What was Janis like in person?*

McDonald: Well, Janis was really obsessed with turning herself into Janis Joplin and she was very aggressive. She wanted to be Otis Redding. She had heard Otis and she really loved Otis Redding and she wanted to *be* Otis Redding.

She really wanted approval. She was kind of an ordinary, down-home girl, you know, and she was very, very smart. Very aggressive and didn't want anything to do with politics. She said, "I don't need no-fucking-body telling me nothing, man."

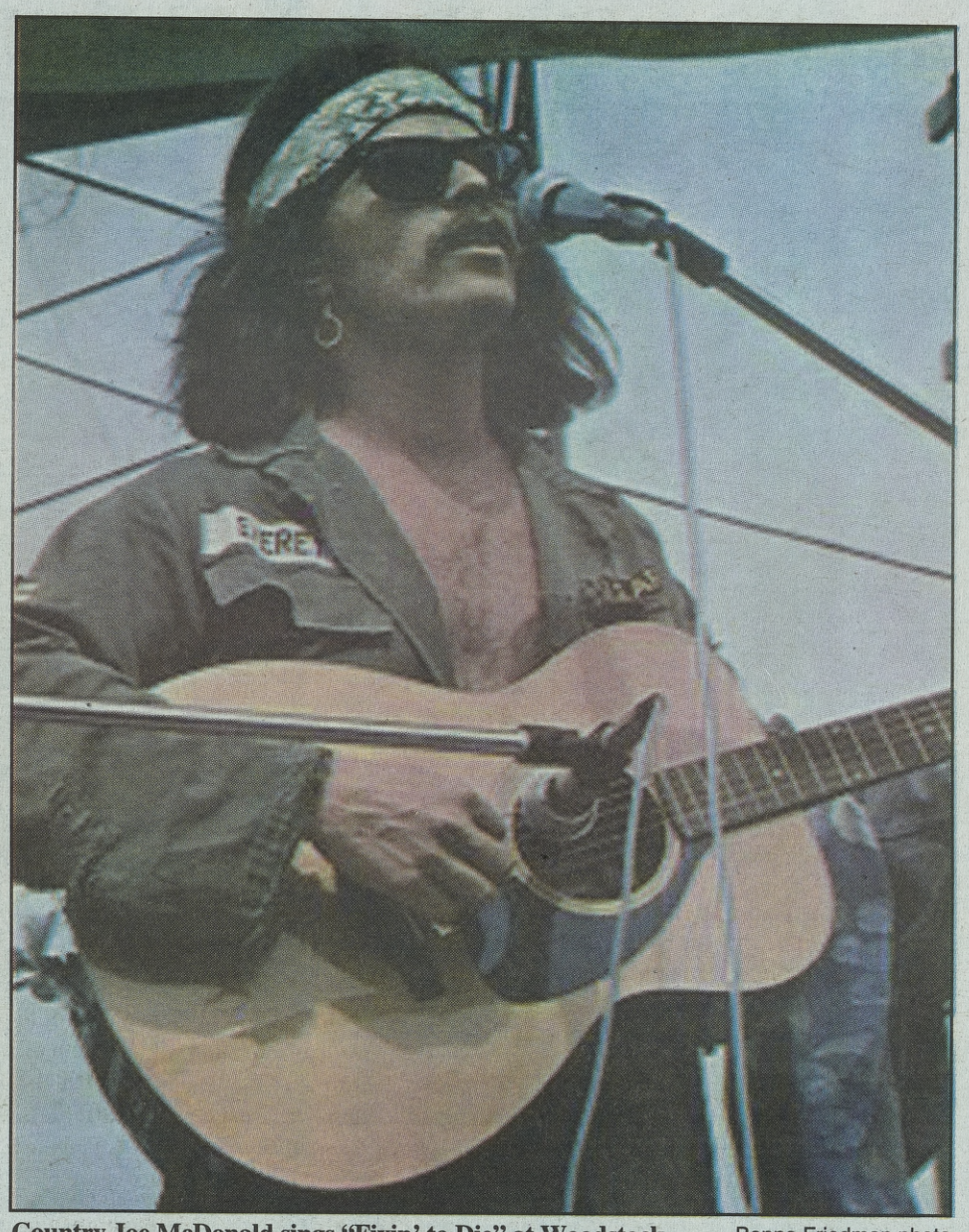
Spirit: *Speaking of historic festivals, there's that amazing moment at Woodstock when you were able to get hundreds of thousands to join you in singing to stop the Vietnam War. How did you end up all alone on the Woodstock stage, without the rest of the Fish, singing to that massive audience?*

McDonald: By the time Country Joe and the Fish came to Woodstock, the band was pretty much falling apart. Three of the original members were gone and we had new members. Chicken Hirsh, our drummer, had just quit the band abruptly, less than two months before that. I was really not liking the band anymore.

The magic that we had in the original arrangements — the complicated, wonderful, psychedelic songs that we were playing on the first album — could not even be played by this new band. We were making money, but we were on the treadmill of a road band going out and playing gigs. I felt really estranged from the band.

But I have always loved playing outdoors and I loved these festivals. We had played the Monterey Festival and I loved watching all the other bands because I just love music and I loved this new music.

So I went to Woodstock on Thursday without the band. The band came on Friday. I went out to the stage to see what was happening because I loved watching the production get going before the bands come, and then the bands setting up and playing. I love the whole gestalt of a rock show. On the second day, I was there early when Santana was supposed to go on. I was hanging around the stage just digging the scene, and Santana couldn't get through because of the traffic.



Country Joe McDonald sings "Fixin' to Die" at Woodstock. Benno Friedman photo

"Everybody agreed on the same premise: peace and love. It was a moment of peace and love. And it really happened. I don't know how or why it happened. But it was a wonderful thing to happen."

So Bill Belmont, the guy who was our road manager, was kind of moonlighting on the production staff of Woodstock, with John Morris who was the production coordinator. They were upset because they couldn't put Santana on as the next act. So I was sitting on the stage and John and Bill came over and said, "How would you like to start your solo career?" I said, "What the hell are you talking about?" They told me, "Just go out and play some stuff until Santana gets here."

I didn't really want to do it, so I told them I didn't have a guitar. They went and found a cheap, really great Yamaha guitar, a Yamaha FG 150, and they gave it to me. I was looking for excuses then, so I said, "I don't have a guitar strap." So Bill Belmont cut a piece of rope off the rigging and tied it to the guitar and they pushed me out on stage.

I didn't know what the hell to do, so I sang a couple country-western songs off my album and I sang a couple other songs from my repertoire, and nobody in the audience was paying any attention to me.

Spirit: *What was it like to be suddenly and unexpectedly pushed out on stage before hundreds of thousands of people?*

McDonald: You know, I've always felt more comfortable on stage than off stage, so I was used to it and I was pretty relaxed about it. But my mind was blown when I came there on Friday and walked up on stage and saw the audience. That was incredible. It was so exciting.

It was so huge. But when I sang, no one was paying any attention to me at all. It was like a giant family picnic out there. But I decided to do the "Fish Cheer" and "Fixin' to Die Rag" and I started feeling a little bit excited about it.

Spirit: *A little excited? You yelled at everyone at Woodstock to start singing against the war, and all of a sudden hundreds of thousands of people exploded into a massive antiwar outcry.*

McDonald: I went up to the microphone and I just yelled, "Give me an F!" And they all stopped talking to each other and looked at me and yelled, "F!" And I thought, "Oh boy, here we go."

So I got pretty brave because they did the whole Fish Cheer with me, and then I was singing the song, "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag." I could see that the crowd seemed to be having a good time and they started to stand up, so I got really brave. I started haranguing them to sing louder, because if you want to stop the war you have to sing louder than that.

I went on and finished the song and they were all standing up and jumping up and down — and there you go. But I didn't know they were making a movie of it. I didn't even notice that.

Spirit: *What did you think the first time you watched the movie and saw "Fixin' to Die Rag" with the bouncing ball to the lyrics and a huge crowd singing and cheering your anti-war message?*

McDonald: Well, I was delighted. You know, Michael Wadleigh, the director, had drawn upon documentary film crews to put together his film crew to shoot *Woodstock* in 16 millimeter film. All of those crews were people who had been working on sociopolitical documentaries up to the time of Woodstock, and Michael himself had roots in sociopolitical documentaries and social movements in America.

So he really jumped onto putting in "Fixin' to Die Rag" as being a sociopolitical statement — a contemporary statement about the Vietnam War, because generally speaking, no one was making a political statement in the film. Joan Baez talked about her husband being in jail as a draft resister, and the Richie Havens song "Freedom" seems to have overtones of being political, but really nobody was making a political statement.

Joe McDonald joined the Navy at 17.

So Michael Wadleigh really liked that song, and he called me about three months after the festival to go down to L.A. We sat in the projection room together, just me and him, and he showed me what you see in the *Woodstock* film of me singing with the bouncing ball.

I couldn't believe it. It was really cool. He said, "How do you like it?" And I said, "Whoa, that's great." I had no idea it would change my life.

Spirit: *How did it change your life?*

McDonald: When I walked off stage, John Morris said into the microphone, "That was Country Joe McDonald." So it established me as Country Joe McDonald and that identity of making a statement about the Vietnam War. It allowed me to go on and have a solo career, and travel all over the world and make records and have bands.

It also enabled me to be somebody Vietnam veterans could look to, and in hearing that song, to cope and deal with the insanity of the Vietnam War. Because the song does not say anything bad about soldiers. It just makes a statement about the war and the social and political roots of the war and how it came to be.

Just recently, I got asked by Bob Santelli, who is the executive director of the Grammy Museum in L.A. and also worked at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, to be a participant at a symposium on the Vietnam War in Austin, Texas. [*Editor*: The Vietnam War Summit will be held April 26-28 at the LBJ Presidential Library.]

There's one session called "One, Two, Three: What Are We Fighting For? The soundtrack of the Vietnam War, in country and at home." I will be there, being interviewed by Bob Santelli and singing some songs. I never dreamed that would happen.

Spirit: *Singing those words — "one, two, three, what are we fighting for" — took you from a street corner in Berkeley to Woodstock and now, all the way to the Vietnam War summit at the LBJ Library.*

McDonald: Well, especially because in 1965, when we made that little EP, that 7 inch record in the jug-band style of music, it had "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" on it. But it also had another song called "Superbird," which was about Lyndon Baines Johnson.

I joked with Bob and I said maybe I'll sing "Superbird." I think he got a little bit nervous because it has that chorus: "We're going to send you back to Texas to work on your ranch."

All that never, never would have happened if it hadn't been for Woodstock. So there you go!

*** *** *** *** ***

The second installment of the *Street Spirit* interview with Country Joe McDonald will appear in the June issue.

Dogtown Redemption: Finding Gold in the Garbage

Film review by Carol Denney

Amir Soltani, producer and co-director of *Dogtown Redemption*, hugs Miss Hayok Kay, a homeless recycler who was killed while living on the street, a tragic end to a woman well-loved by many friends.

When Amir Soltani first moved onto a quiet street in Oakland he noticed a parade of people coming by periodically to check the garbage. One after another throughout the day they would peer into the bins looking for redeemable bottles and cans.

The earliest person might find a few. Those who came later in the day would find less, or nothing, and Soltani began to want to talk to the recyclers, if only to tell them someone else had gotten there first and nothing was left.

The ingenuity and determination of the recyclers intrigued him. The lack of communication between householders in Oakland casually tossing away redeemable materials, while people made a living by gathering them for recycling, left him feeling disturbed and wanting to address the disconnection.

Eight years later, the film *Dogtown Redemption* was born, through the work of co-directors Amir Soltani and Chihiro Wimbush, a grant from the Berkeley Film Foundation, and a list of contributors so large it took several minutes for them to scroll by at the end of the film's East Bay screening on March 1st at the new Parkway Theater on 24th Street in Oakland.

The applause for the film in this comfortable, well-appointed new theater swelled and sustained when it was over and the principals gathered for questions. It began with a broad shot of the sparkling view of West Oakland from the hills and then dialed in to the tender detail of the lives of recyclers themselves and Alliance Recycling's dogged effort to continue its over 30 years of legal recycling operations for its own sake, the environment's sake, and the sake of the hundreds who depend on recycling for income.

"We started making a film about poverty," stated Soltani during the question-and-answer period after the film. "We ended up making a film about love."

The poverty of the recyclers profiled in the film is quietly illustrated as people alternately find or lose housing and shelter options, find or lose loving relationships with family, friends, and lovers, and get a handle on their health and hope.

The filmmakers spent years on the street establishing trust with *Dogtown Redemption*'s main subjects, recyclers given intimate, respectful portraits. The despair of former Polkacide drummer Miss Hayok Kay's visit to a lost love's gravesite is given its pure gravity, and the spontaneous dance she does with a friend in a parking lot to music they sing together is treated with loving dignity. The camera itself seems to have completely disappeared early in the film.

But the powerful portrait of poverty in this film is almost secondary to the portrait of the extremely hard work it is to make a living from recycling. If you ever wondered how a recycling facility works, or how far people walk in a day for materials, how they balance the carts, or how much the materials weigh or are worth, this film will not only answer your questions from the mouths of the recyclers themselves, but it will knock you flat with the recognition that few jobs could be harder than this one.

Few jobs require earlier hours, more determination, more knowledge, and more literal strength. Alliance Recycling, over its years in business, has saved an estimated 1,735,258 gallons of oil and an estimated 8,712,078 gallons of water. Neighborhood recyclers, according to Alliance Recycling, "collectively salvage over 15,000 tons of materials each year that would otherwise go to landfills."1

The community of people that does this work is black, white, Asian, and Hispanic. It is young, old, addicted, healthy, as capable and as culpable as any of us are in any housed community.

The intersection of lives, on track and off, weaves through our experience of the recyclers lives, making us inevitably feel like part of the fabric. We are the recyclers at times, heroically ploughing the East Bay's rough streets, diverting reusable materials from the waste stream. We are the neighbors at times, depressed by the daily sight of poverty.

The church's outreach helps former recycler Landon Goodwin's path to stability, marriage, and steady employment. Teachers at a martial arts dojo help recycler Jason Witt recognize and affirm his own innate powers of balance and discipline without which, he stated, "I know I'd be dead by now."

An outreach group helps Miss Kay acquire the identification card she needs to apply for assistance, which she briefly succeeds in doing before despair takes her back to the street, where she is victimized by an assault which left her in a coma before her death. The film is dedicated to her memory.

Recycling bottles, cans, plastics and metal is not romanticized in the film, but it is easy to see the way it makes sense to someone who needs work and watches what Bay Area citizens throw away without thinking. Toys, clothes, books, as well as recyclables are easy to find in Bay Area dumpsters and garbage bins.

We may think of ourselves as green, but sometimes the East Bay Depot for Creative Reuse or Urban Ore option is apparently just too far to travel, and as more recycling centers close, people have to travel even farther through the streets. For people quick enough, strong enough, and smart enough, the Bay Area's catastrophic amount of garbage can be culled for real gold.

The recyclers are occasionally accused of theft; PG&E pipe showed up one day at Alliance Recycling, bringing a wreath of police officers and a day without business. Alliance uses video cameras to cooperate with the police on potential theft issues.

Recyclers are occasionally accused of peeing in the wrong place, the same soluble problem any neighborhood encounters with college kids partying in the streets or Bay to Breakers runners cutting corners on their way to the finish line.

But the neighborhood voice that has the Oakland City Council's ear right now is pretty obviously objecting to the sight of poverty itself, even poverty with the willingness to walk 15 miles a day redeeming materials no one else bothers with, just to make a difficult but independent living.

The majority of any scavenger's haul is bottles and cans — bottles and cans which the film depicts in noisy, seemingly endless cascading waterfalls of color. The careful nuance and artifice poured into the appealing, colorful design of each can by corporate marketing teams becomes a riotous patchwork once sorted and crushed together, a small ratio of East Bay waste diverted from landfill by the dedication of street recyclers.

Former Congressional Representative Ron Dellums is featured in the film making the important connection to Oakland's pivotal role in World War II. Oakland was "Ellis Island West" for the black men and women who were crucial in building the ships, the businesses, and the community that helped win the war, a community which recycled as a matter of course. Even children at the time collected materials such as scrap metal, an activity considered a civic duty and an exercise in patriotism.

When the government wanted workers for the shipyards of Richmond, it not only succeeded in creating one of the first instances of an integrated work force, both racially and by gender: it built housing. Not integrated housing, but more than 23,000 units of workforce housing in four years, including family housing, dorms for single men, and recreational facilities for children. This is something worth contemplation.

It isn't that the government, in state, federal, or municipal form, doesn't know how to build housing for low-income, working people. It's that, right now, its ear is tuned in to developers' needs and a few complaints from homeowners who object to the sound and sight of shopping carts rattling by.

Lena Rickles, the attorney for Alliance Recycling, says the business is slated to close this August, leaving hundreds of people who currently depend on recycling at risk of having no legal options for survival. "Neighbors did not want to look at them," she says simply of the cascade of nuisance complaints this legal business has consistently and successfully fought. "When we damage their humanity we damage our own."

Jason Witt, whose recycling feats are legend, called tent cities "inhumane" during the discussion after the film, a discussion which looked like a joyous family reunion for the film's participants and crew. He broke hearts suggesting that people "come down in person and open up your...everything" as a step in awareness for interested people. "We have to stop looking at the problems that we think we have and look at the problems we really have."

Co-director Chihiro Wimbush said, "I just happened to spend five years following people through the streets," adding that he still couldn't believe "how hard working these people really are."

Without this film, its grant from the Berkeley Film Foundation, and the enormously supportive community that helped it along, this is a story which might never have been told. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the spirit that brought thousands to work building 747 ships for the war effort in the 1940s is still here in Oakland, at least in the character of the people willing to get up every day and sift through the unwanted debris of arguably the most wasteful society on earth to pan for personal survival.

Don't miss this film!

Dogtown Redemption April Screenings

Tuesday, April 5
7 pm @ The Roxie
3117 16th St., San Francisco
roxie.com

Thursday, April 7
7 pm @ San Rafael Film Center
1118 Fourth St., San Rafael
rafaelfilm.cafilm.org

Saturday, April 9
3 pm @ The New Parkway Theater 474 24th St., Oakland

Sunday, April 10
1 pm @ The New Parkway Theater 474 24th St., Oakland
thenewparkway.com